SHADOWRUN
HONG KONG

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INTRODUCTION

Seven and a half million people crammed into about 1,100 square kilometers. Nearly 6,800 people per square kilometer. Not the tightest-packed city in the world, at least not in terms of people, but still up there. But in terms of wealth, secrets, intrigue, and double-crosses? No place in the world is more densely packed. With seven and a half million people, you have seven and a half million personal agendas, and fifteen or twenty million schemes to get ahead in the world, because nobody has just one. Those plans run from the wealthiest corporations jockeying for politically and magically advantageous positions in the city to the poorest of the poor, fighting to avoid being devoured by the horrors that lurk in the Kowloon Walled City. Step into the sprawl and prepare to trip over conflicting agendas, spiraling plots, and secrets nested in secrets.

Hong Kong: Neon Contrails fleshes out the sprawl that is the setting for the *Shadowrun: Hong Kong* video game. It provides more details and texture for the sprawl, while also offering plotlines, geographic information, and characters players of the *Shadowrun* tabletop role-playing game can use to run Hong Kong adventures set in 2055. The book opens with *The Scratched Pearl*, providing details about the sprawl and its neighborhood that any shadowrunner needs to know. *Bending the Machine* follows that up with the people runners need to know if they want to navigate the mean streets of Hong Kong and stay alive long enough to collect a paycheck. *The Best of Hong Kong* takes a look at the runners of the city, while also showing the layers of intrigue that can make life in the city so challenging for people in the shadows. *Tangled Webs* dips into the labyrinthine plots that keep nuyen flowing into shadowrunners' pockets, providing plot hooks and campaign ideas for players looking to take their game into Hong Kong. Finally, *Game Information* offers some brief tips for running in Hong Kong using *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition* rules.

Part of the color of the sprawl are the runners that sneak through its dark corners, so this book offers pictures and brief descriptions of a whole selection of them (like the one on this page, for example). With the people, plots, geographic info, and other useful data in your book, you'll be ready to bring the rich atmosphere of the *Shadowrun: Hong Kong* to your tabletop game. If the video game was your first taste of *Shadowrun*, or you've never played the tabletop role-playing game before, get ready to launch into wide-open storytelling where players' only limits are their creativity and imagination—and how well they can roll a large handful of six-sided dice, of course.

Peace Out's fast draw with a pistol and even faster moves with a sword ensure that you should never feel peaceful when he's nearby.

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BACK-ALLEY BRAWL

BY RUSSELL ZIMMERMAN

The Four Thunders were on a roll. Seven Resplendent Tigers had gotten them together just six months ago—he'd already worked with Storm of the Road prior to that, but getting Dog Emperor and Smiling Cat on board had really rounded out the crew—and they'd already started to build a reputation in the Hong Kong shadows as a reliable shadowrunner team. They specialized in mobile ops, Storm and Dragons in the van, Cat and Dog running interference on their combat-specced racing bikes, and right off the bat they'd started to get regular work with the Red Dragons Triad.

Their current gig, Seven Resplendent Tigers assured them, was going to seal the deal. The Red Dragons had been having trouble chasing down the Chungking Chargers, a go-gang who'd been undercutting the Triads' reputation, horning in on the fringes of their turf, making them look slow and clumsy. The Red Dragons were a behemoth, a monster, a titan. They were built for slick, glossy-black SUVs full of shooters, they were designed for running whole neighborhoods, they were prepped to fight off the White Lotus Triad and other criminal giants; squashing scuttling cockroaches was hard, when you were that big.

So they'd outsourced. The Red Dragons had put up a standing offer, and so far no one had been able to claim the prize; whoever put the Chungking Chargers in their place, the Triads would hook up with positions—legit positions, totally legal, high-paying, high-profile—on Hong Kong's superstar Combat Biker squad, the Cavaliers.

The Four Thunders, with their tricked-out wheels and their combat wires, their gleaming chrome and their chattering autoguns, were out to move up the ladder.

Smiling Cat and Seven Resplendent Tigers were winding their way through the bustling back-alley marketplace, a maze of warbling sellers, neon lights, and the rich, clashing smells of a dozen or

a hundred food stalls all competing for attention. Open-air body mod artists and crude street docs spilled blood next to cleaver-swinging butchers, fried-noodle stands glared through the crowd at one another all day and night, pocket secretaries and other portable electronics were hawked or disassembled for parts, and portable stalls selling cheap clothes and cheaper knock-offs vied for traveler's business.

And then, of course, there was the protection rackets, the business within the business, the shadows within the shadows.

The Red Dragons' boys had come through earlier in the week. Every Tuesday, like clockwork, slick men with slick hair and slick suits rolled through, eyes hidden behind implanted cyberoptic shades, hands held out for their weekly take. Everyone paid. Everyone had to.

But it wasn't a Tuesday. Days later, while the Triad crews were off working a different alley, a

Marcus Vinncinni. His debts to organized crime means he often has to run for the Triads. So he knows about the Four Thunders.

different sprawl of buyers and sellers, pickpockets and hustlers, joyboys and joygirls, while the Red Dragons' mighty eyes were elsewhere, the Chungking Chargers rolled in. Their nimble little bikes, souped up for sound as much as for speed, howled their arrival, and they took turns unmounting, jandering from stall to stall, flashing some spurs, some implanted muscles, or a cheap street gun, to get money and fear because they couldn't quite manage respect.

"In position," Dog Emperor said, straddling his own armored-up Yamaha Rapier combat bike, down at one end of North Point Alley. He spoke into a mic built into his motorcycle helmet, the only member of the team without any cyberware.

"Still all set," Storm of the Road's electronic voice chimed to the team, the rigger sprawled in her van, implanted hardware translating her thoughts to the team as vocals. Her meat-body was snug in the van at the other end of the alley, but her attention was in her combat rotordrone, high overhead.

"Eyes on," Seven Resplendent Tigers said, a subvocal microphone implanted somewhere in the razorboy's jawline, the least of his chrome.

"I'm workin' on it, fraggers, be patient," Smiling Cat snapped, scowling despite her street name. She had her head shaved high on one side, freshly smooth, not a hint of glossy black stubble near the cluster of datajacks that rode high over her left ear.

Cat was on point tonight, the Four Thunders' electronics wizard, being watched over by the protective Seven Resplendent Tigers, charged with bugging a Chungking Charger's bike.

"It's not like these boys get far from their toys," she grouched, frowning towards the nearest knot of go-gangers from her spot in line at a pork bun stall.

Two Chargers were on foot, shaking down an old man with a table covered in knock-off watches. Their arguing was louder than the wizened old merchant's blaring radio, a Mercurial tune ringing out and fighting against the perpetual background noise of the night market. Four more Chargers hovered nearby, straddling their bikes or leaning against them, all with a hawkish eye on the crowd.

The Four Thunders had a simple plan. Bug a Charger's street machine, follow them to where ever their base was, and wade in, combat drones leading the way. If any Chargers made it to their bikes to blast out of there, the Thunders would chase them down and beat them at their own game. At the end of the night? Sell bikes to Red Dragon chop-shops, show off the bodies to Red Dragon bosses, and grab the glory, the street cred, and the chance to go combat biking.

Only bugging a go-ganger's bike was easier said than done.

"I can cause a distraction," Tigers growled, augmented muscles rippling. "A little brawl, get their attention, bug out before things get too seri—"

"No need," Storm's robotic voice cut him off, but the eye in the sky didn't apologize. "They're moving. Look."

Visible, now, to the ones on the ground, the Chargers were distracted by something; no, some*one*. They'd started hooting, laughing, pointing. They sounded like hyenas. They sounded like punks. They sounded like trouble.

"Isn't that Shen's old lady?" Cat squinted.

"So what if it is?" Tigers' voice was flat. They'd never gotten along.

"So Shen did right by us." Dog Emperor tried to see from behind his helmet's faceplate, idling bike rolling him a little closer. "He vouched for us and got us the gig."

"Yeah, and now he's dead." Tigers didn't care.

"She's with his kid." Cat didn't have to fake disinterest, everyone else in line was craning to watch.

The Chargers had swooped down at a fish stand and had started pitching carcasses at the woman, one of them flashing a switchblade to silence the frantic fish-seller. Mrs. Shen, a Triad killer's widow, didn't turn away from the reeking onslaught, just twisted to protect the skinny boy next to her from it.

"Just a dead traitor's wife and a pixie brat," Tigers grunted. "Not our problem. Cat, tag the bikes."

"But we can't—" Dog started.

"Tag. The. Bikes."

Smiling Cat slipped out of her line, hands in her jacket pockets, and Tigers slid sideways to block line of sight with his sheer bulk—not that any of the Chargers were paying any attention to their forgotten bikes. Cat dropped to a low squat and got to work, snaking her small hands to find out-of-the-way places to hide her sensors.

"Aww, frag." The curse lacked all inflection—Storm's tinny voice sapped the urgency from it.

One of the Chargers was howling and cursing even more sincerely, a little folding knife jutting out of his denim-clad thigh, the fish-seller's bucket of blood and slime held over his head, about to toss it onto Shen's widow.

The dead man's son, a coltish boy, elven-tall and elven-skinny, didn't let up after the quick stabbing; he started punching, angry, eyes narrow with rage, fists flailing.

"They're gonna kill him," Dog said, engine revving.

"Bikes are tagged. We fade," Tigers shook his head, staring right down the alley and frowning. Cat slipped back into the crowd.

The beating started. Two Chargers grabbed the boy and held him from behind, while the leg-stabbed leader limped over and started punching. Two more had Mrs. Shen in a handsy tangle, making her watch while her son took a few shots to the belly. The last was laughing and watching, not sure which dogpile to join in on.

Chao Shen had been a strong man, a feared man, a man protected by the Red Dragons Triad. Chao Shen had kept his family safe. He'd died trying to redeem his name after being charged with disloyalty; the Red Dragons hadn't gone after his wife and son for his crimes, weeks earlier, but they also hadn't extended their protection. Seven Resplendent Tigers was just glad that his team's reputation hadn't been sullied by the whole thing. He'd vouched for them early, after all, and the Incense Master could have easily questioned their loyalty by extension.

Chao Shen was gone, now. His family was fair game, and the Chargers were having their fun.

Young Bing Lei Shen spat blood and curses—not at the glowering Charger beating him, but at the ones grabbing his mother. Another few punches took the air out of him, but not the anger. His eyes went wide with worry as his mother was thrown to the ground. A more immediate threat loomed before the boy, though, as the gang leader grimaced and dragged the little knife from his leg, spitting and preparing to turn it against the elven youth.

"We fade," Tigers said again, trying to keep his team on a leash. The bugs were planted. They just had to be patient. "We just wait. We follow them later. We do the job."

The rigger known as K did some time with the military, the corps, and the Triads. That last means he keeps an eye out for anything that might help or hurt them.

"Can't do it, boss." An engine growled along with the response.

Dog Emperor's sleek Rapier knifed through the crowd, headlight and horn clearing the way, red-lining his engine to build up speed despite his short lead-up room. Dog slipped the brake just so, slid the back tire out wide to one side, laid the bike down as it swept down the alley low—a sideways wedge—and he leapt airborne at the last instant.

The three Chargers standing over Mrs. Shen had time to look over stupidly before his bike slammed into them. One of them went down with his knees and shins and thighs all wrong, bones jutting and denim ruined. The second scrambled for the relative safety of a side street, eyes wide. The third felt very clever as he hopped over the bike, until the airborne adept, Dog Emperor, flew into him with all a racing bike's momentum behind his jump kick. The Charger didn't get back up. Dog Emperor did, barely scuffed.

He tugged his helmet off and held it in front of him, eyes bright, teeth flashing, hair wild.

"Let the kid go," he said, giving the three that were left just that one chance to pick up their friends and go about their brutish business elsewhere.

They threw young Bing Lei into the filth next to his mother—she already checking on him, him already checking on her—and charged, instead.

Dog Emperor dropped his helmet and kicked it like a soccer ball, the sphere of impact-resistant polymers smashing the lead go-ganger's nose in a spray of blood. The second Charger thrust with a chrome-flashing switchblade, but Dog sidestepped it, backpedaled away, slapped at the ganger's wrist and forearm and hand, making him miss—only just barely, but miss—again and again and again. A quick front kick shoved the Charger away and bought him a second.

Another Charger scrambled for a weapon and came at him with a fishmonger's cleaver, swinging it in big back-and-forth arcs, and it was all Dog Emperor could do to sidestep, duck, and weave away from the fresh onslaught. Dog jostled the watch-seller's table and rolled backwards onto it, just as another cleaver-swing split the flimsy table.

"Crap," he said, lying in a heap, tangled with a dingy tablecloth, as the cleaver went up again.

"Damn it, Dog," Smiling Cat still wasn't smiling as her extendable baton swept out—crack, crack, crack—and lashed out at the cleaver-wielding Charger in a flurry of strikes. She was quicker than he was, and probably just as strong, but he had size and reach on her; while any one good hit from her club might break bone, any solid swing from his cleaver could split her open. Her rush bought Dog Emperor time to kip-up and brush himself off, shooting her an incorrigible grin.

"Couldn't let the kid get shanked, Cat." Dog Emperor faced off with the switch-blade wielder again. His left hand flipped a knock-off watch at the Charger's head to distract him, then a second, then a third. Hup, hup, hup, flick, flick, flick, and then just as the knifesman fell into the pattern of swatting the irritating little distractions away, Dog stepped into it and swung with the watch-seller's blocky radio. With all his adept power behind it, the makeshift club smashed into the Charger's head, breaking into a dozen pieces but not doing the ganger's skull any favors, either. The Charger dropped, out cold.

The Charger with a bloody nose—helmet-face!—came at Dog Emperor, a length of chain clattering and whooshing through the air. Dog got battered with it once, twice, and then lashed out with his left forearm the third time, metal rings clanking as they looped around his biker-jacket-armored limb. The Ganger's eyes went wide for a second, realizing his mistake, and then Dog gave a hearty pull. Off-balance and over-extended, the Charger got tugged right into Dog Emperor's follow-up head kick. Falling like he'd been poleaxed, the ganger fell into a puddle right next to his switchblade-wielding friend.

Dog saw that Smiling Cat had her Charger down—cleaver nowhere to be seen, one hand holding onto his bloody mouth, the other hand a purplish mess with bent-wrong fingers—before another foursome of go-gangers burst into sight, drawn by all the commotion. Cat ran to intercept them, her whirling baton leading the way, just as Dog felt a burning pain low in his back and spun.

The leader of their first little pack, the one who'd taken a knife to the leg and had wanted to return it to little Bing Lei Shen, had finally limped into the fray—and stabbed Dog right in the back.

Ignoring the lance of pain and the spreading warmth, Dog Emperor brought up his chain-wrapped left arm, using it as a shield against the flurry of knife-strikes. Sparks flew and chains rattled as the men shouted and advanced at one another, sideways like fencers, knife and chain weaving before them, one stiff-legged from a stab, the other tense from the wound near a kidney.

Dog snuck in a few quick snap-kicks and a good high punch, but the Charger wasn't dropping easily. Just when he felt like he had the measure of the man, two more go-gangers arrived—a quick glance showed Smiling Cat had her hands full with the other two—and Dog had to get back to scrambling, ducking, dodging, backpedaling, and making due with whatever he could find.

A fish stall blurred past and Dog Emperor kicked a bucket to make one Charger's arms pinwheel as he scrambled on the extra-slick alley. Knock-off blue jeans were wadded and thrown, cracked like

a whip, used to tangle one Charger's eyes as Dog drove a rising knee at his face just afterward. A noodle stall turned into a battleground, Dog Emperor staving off a flurry of knife strikes and fresh cleaver swings with a hot wok, a split second after emptying the pan in one attacker's face. A vendor's stool was used as a shield until cleaver strikes pared off two of the three legs, then Dog spun it, twirled it, struck with it, and eventually waded back into the fight with the hacked-off legs spinning like Escrima sticks, ratta-tat-tatting out a pattern of pain as furiously as he could.

Dog Emperor found himself back to back with Smiling Cat, the woman's cyberdeck still snug against her back, her trusty little baton a little bent to one side but the striking tip slick with blood, as yet more Chargers rushed into the long-emptied market alley.

The pair of them spun warily, eyes all around, as snarling thugs swept in closer, feinted to see what the shadowrunners would do, hurled insults and threats, and worked up the courage to rush.

One came in and swiftly regretted it. Cat dropped him with three quick strikes to the head, Dog snatched up his baseball bat and gave it a balance-checking spin, and the two of them gave one another satisfied nods.

Three came next, all roaring. Fists and feet flew, Dog swaying against Smiling Cat's back at first, then spinning away from her. He checked a front-kick, followed it up with a jab of the bat that left a Charger spitting blood and teeth, tossed his shaggy-long hair out of his eyes just in time to catch a punch to the mouth, and retaliated with an angry *qi* strike of his own that left his attacker a heap on the wet pavement. Cat hissed and danced, long legs leading with deceptively quick kicks, then finished off her opponent with the butt-end of her baton to the temple.

They stood back to back again, the calm in the eye of the storm, ready.

A Charger shouldered his way through the pack of them, a head taller than his peers, ork-broad in the shoulders, ork-ugly in the face. He pulled a big wheelgun from his belt with a nasty sneer, thumbed the chromed revolver's hammer back, and very pointedly sighted down the long barrel right at Dog Emperor.

The adept lifted the bat like it was a sword and gave the big Charger a miniscule nod past it; *go ahead*, the nod said, *If you need the gun to beat me, show the whole world that*.

"Do it," Tigers grunted into his headware microphone.

Dual assault rifles chattered from up high, Storm of the Road's gun-drone raining death on the line of Chargers, starting with the ork and his gun.

The roto-drone swept low, chattering away the whole time, dakka-dakka-dakka, parting the crowd and carving an escape route for Dog and Cat to scramble away; Cat kicking a cowering Charger in the vitals as he didn't move quickly enough, Dog breaking the bat over one's head as he passed.

They dove into Storm's waiting van, and the rigger's gun-drone swept high and away on autopilot as she threw her attention into driving. A whole wave of bike engines roared to life behind them, headlights blinking to life, glaring at them like the eyes of a hungry wolf pack, ready, now, to chase down and maul this creature that had bloodied them.

Seven Resplendent Tigers cursed at Dog Emperor as the young adept could only shrug to defend himself. Storm of the Roads lay immobile in her driver's seat, strapped in securely, her up-engined van already adding distance between the Four Thunders and their pursuers. Smiling Cat settled into the passenger side, swung her cyberdeck around into her lap, and gave them a Cheshire's grin.

"A beacon's on the move," she twisted to look smug at Tigers in the back, saving Dog from their boss's wrath.

"So all we've gotta do now is ditch these guys, and the plan's back on! Storm does her job, I do mine, and your boys' plot is saved after all."

"Ha. Ha. Ha." The rigger's tinny voice rang out in the team comms. "Cavaliers, here we come."

"See, boss?" Dog Emperor tried his best smile. "It'll all work out. Plus I got you this watch!"

Seven Resplendent Tigers didn't quite throw him out the back of the van for the scratched, blood-stained, knock-off the adept offered, but he was tempted.

THE SCRATCHED PEARL

Even from this deep in the bay of pearls, Yankee could smell the place. It lurked out there beyond Hong Kong's neon horizon like a beacon of depravity, beckoning those who didn't or couldn't belong anywhere else. The locals called it the Walled City, six-and-a-half acres of buildings pressed together as tight as cyberettes and twice as toxic. If Yankee's contact was good to her word, then the place in his client's vision was in the middle of that mess. The skies above the Zhu Jiang were choked with smog-black clouds spitting raindrops that sizzled as they bounced off his raincoat. The water chopped and churned a frothy milk of ash, and the ferry shook with the force of each wave. If he didn't get a smoke soon he was going to be seasick, but the weather didn't seem to bother his companion at all.

He lit a cyberette and turned to the woman standing next to him. She was razor thin with hard edges. Her black trenchcoat billowed around her. The grizzled shadowrunner had to shout against the wind and the rain to draw her attention.

"Last chance to call this off!"

She fixed him with a stare, her angular jaw jutting out further in a look of defiance. The look did little to flatter her, but as long as he'd known Frosty the expression had scared him. "I've been through a lot of slums in my time," he said. "This place we're going ranks near the bottom. What you need we can surely get somewhere else in town."

She shook her head. "What I need is location. What I'm trying to do is difficult already. It becomes impossible if I can't strike the right ... relationship with the earth."

He knew better than to ask her anything more about the job. People hired him because he kept his mouth shut and didn't ask questions, but Hong Kong changed things. Kowloon changed things. He'd come this way once before to pull a wet-behind-the-ears Yakuza shooter out of some trouble with the triads. That fledgling familiarity with the place earned him this return trip—that and the fact that nobody local was willing to take the job. He said, "I'm just saying it's a long way to go to light a couple of candles, incense, or whatever it is you plan to do in there."

That worked a smile out of her. It was solemn and brought a touch of rose to her pale cheeks. "This is the way of Magic, Yankee. We can't choose where the power touches the earth. Besides, if there is trouble, I have you."

Yankee shuddered and tried to pretend it was from the cold.

POSTED BY: THE DRAGON REBORN

Consider for a moment the perfect shadowrunner city. What would it look like? You would need to have a border set against an oppressive regime whose population creates an undeniable market for smuggled goods. You would need to have several boroughs, towns, or districts that exist largely independent of one another yet share a common set of laws and overarching ruling body.

- You'd need to have a thriving black market for magical goods and services. Yep, handled.
- Jian Jane

Above all, it needs to be a sprawl with uneven borders and a section of town so dense and crime ridden that it is a better choice to eradicate than to ever try to rehabilitate. No, this is not Seattle. This is the runner haven that came long before Seattle crawled out of its post-American womb. The scratched pearl of the southeast.

- To hear it from Shen Lo-Fun, we ought to throw a neon sign up at the mouth of the Zhu Jiang that says, "Abandon All Hope Ye who Enter Here."
- Marco Solo

Hong Kong happened slowly, building like a computer virus woven deep into the root kit. Since the beginning the coastal town was a source of contention for the Chinese. It fell under the influence of the Japanese, then the British, and finally the corporations. When I became a teenager and first found my way to Hong Kong, I expected a sprawling metropolis of skyrakers and streets piled so high with neon and concrete that nothing green could ever grow. Instead I found a sprawl at war with itself. Fishing villages are living literally in the shadow of corporate high rises, all existing under the complicated principles of feng shui. I'm not talking about the passing fancy of someone who turns their couch a particular direction to bring in good fortune. Hong Kong continues to be rebuilt around the concepts of 3,000-year-old metaphysics. Understanding qi changed everything for me.

Everything here is designed to maximize and commodify *qi*.

- Hong Kong is the first Seattle. In 2015 the city tried to declare independence from China. The mainland's military response was met by corporate money flooding in and creating a standoff that still hovers, cloud-like, over the city. It makes for a city rife with opportunities. China wants total control, the corps want the same. Each acts like they have the upper hand, and all of them are playing nice in the PPG.
- Marco Solo

- This place is nothing like Seattle. Mind you, the underlying corporate monopoly game remains intact, but the market forces beyond that are quite different. For one, the sprawl is built atop sequence of dragon lines as old as the world itself. And where there be dragon lines, there be dragons.
- Shen Lo-Fun

The city now known as the Hong Kong Free Enterprise Zone is officially divided into eighteen districts, each governed and ruled by a governmental structure as outdated as the British textbooks they keep behind glass at the Sha Tin Museum. In reality there are only fourteen relevant districts divided as much by the dragon lines as they are by the corporate wealth that pushes skyrakers higher and higher into the night sky. The districts themselves are very distinct, representative of the various cultural, corporate, and criminal forces setting policy. Each is packed with local history, and all of them marred by the influx of refugees from the decade-old Nationalist War.

To the north, the sprawling Chinese city of Shenzen sits across a rugged border that serves as a hot zone of smuggler activity. These wetlands are fed by the Zhu Jiang, or Pearl River, but are controlled by the Triads who enlist farmers to grow a variety of drug crops, which are then smuggled and sold around the world.

- The Pearl River gets its name from the pearl-colored shells that line the bottom of the river. Not long after the Awakening, a group of men dressed as Shaolin monks lined the edges of the river and performed what we now know was geomancy on the water itself. A river that had been growing dark with pollutants over hundreds of years

HONG KONG AT A GLANCE

POPULATION: 12 MILLION

Human	69%
Elf	11%
Dwarf	8%
Ork	6%
Troll	4%
Other	2%

Population Density: (9,100 People per Square Kilometer)
Per Capita Income: 48,000 Nuyen
Corporate-Affiliated Population: 46%

Official Languages: English (British), Chinese (Cantonese)

WEATHER

Hong Kong is a hot box in the summer. The normally wet climate turns humid by late May and continues to swelter well into August. September and October have been trouble spots over the last few years due to increased typhoon activity. It is common to see weather advisories at least once a week, warning of the dangers of traveling by sea.

HOSPITALS:

CrashCart Clinics
DocWagon Services

MEANS OF COMMUTING TO WORK:

Internal Combustion Vehicle: 3%
GridGuide Electric Vehicles, Individual: 12%
GridGuide Electric Vehicles, Group: 16%
Tram: 13%
MCT: 25%
Bus: 21%
On-Site Workers: 11%
Other: 2%

EDUCATION

Less than 12 years: 22%
High School Equivalency: 36%
College Equivalency: 32%
Advanced Degrees and Certificates: 10%

HOTELS

Luxury: Dragon Acres, Peninsula Gardens, Four Seasons
First Class: Radisson, Hilton
Family Style: Pearl Hotels, Tai Tam Suites,
No Frills: Rest Inn, Sleeper Shack, Taj Hotels, Tolo Bunkhouse, Fangzi Dun

GROCERY AND CONVENIENCE STORES

A good amount of Hong Kong grocery shopping takes place in street markets and wet markets, where you can buy fresh vegetables and soymeats. These unaligned peddlers have a range of foods based on the quality of their crops or suppliers. This defies the traditional Luxury to No Frills experience, because the quality of food can change overnight.

Luxury: Zhu Jiang Gourmet, The Buddha's Warehouse, World Market
First Class: More Fresh, GM Grocers
Family Style: Star Grocery, ParkNShop,
No Frills: Snack Shack, ShopMart

RESTAURANTS AND FAST FOOD PLACES

Luxury: Inagiku, Emerald, The Pearl, Shangri-La
First Class: Lun House, Shanghai House,
Family Style: Dai Pai Dong, Golden Star, Good Satay, Cha Chaan Teng
No Frills: Chai Wan Noodle, Happy Dragon, Noodleboy

COMPUTERS AND ELECTRONICS

Luxury: Nybbles & Bytes, Fuchi Digital Showcase
First Class: Universal Omnitech,
Family Style: Microdeck, Wuxing Digital Solutions
No Frills: Hong Kong Elite, Yanma Tech House

BODY ENHANCEMENT CENTERS

Luxury: Chrome
First Class: Body Doctors
Family Style: CybyDesign
No Frills: Infinity Cyber Solutions

was purified in the space of an afternoon. Afterwards the men shuffled off to the north, disappearing into the hills near Shenzen.

- Conspir-I-See

Crime is such a commonplace element in Hong Kong that the question isn't "Are you associated with an organized crime family" but rather "Who are you associated with?" Even the Japancorps that control so much of the high-end real estate are aligned with crime families. Until recently the Hong Kong Police Department was ostensibly run by Mitsuhama and specifically by Daisuke Watada, estranged nephew of the Oyuban Akira Watada.

Crime remains organized well down into street-gang level. Hong Kong except for a handful of outliers, Hong Kong doesn't have proper street gangs. The Chinese tongs merely serve as recruitment tools for the larger and more culturally engrained Triads. The Red Dragon Association and its longstanding agreement with the Yellow Lotus means the upper tier of the ganglands are very unified, leading to a great deal of infighting at the street level and each smaller triad fighting desperately to hold on to their region, their tiny piece of the Hong Kong black market and crime trade.

GETTING AROUND

If you don't mind being assaulted by neon and blaring advertisements, Central Hong Kong's covered moving walkway system, **The Splendid Dragon Path**, is the longest in the world. The escalators move people across the island and even up to Victoria Peak, where a second pathway called the mid-levels go throughout the island. HKB recently teamed with the government to fund additional escalators beneath the bay to New Kowloon.

If walking is not for you, trams running east and west along the island and ferries move people to the outlying islands and Chinese mainland. The city also boasts a bus system that is fairly regular and safe, though service is limited in rougher sections of town such as Kowloon. The MTR underground is the fastest of the public transportation routes, offering express trains out of Central Station and covers points across the city and into the suburbs of the north reach.

DOWNTOWN HONG KONG

Downtown Hong Kong is also known as central district. It covers the northern end of Hong Kong Island, stretching from Kennedy town to Causeway Bay and fed by Connaught Road. The eighty-square-kilometer island feels like someone took Seattle's downtown or New York's Manhattan and painted it with neon markers. This chaos of color is meshed with stretches of deep green that, from street level, appear to be randomly situated parks and walkways. The view from above paints a very different picture. Everything is aligned along the principles of *qi*, the powerful life force that flows from the earth and provides the city with its unique flavor.

- Determined by p or determined by crime? The most difficult aspect of downtown is figuring out where to be and how to not get geeked. You can see the markings change as you move across the city. Parts of the area are Yellow Lotus turf, but step off the wrong sidewalk and suddenly you've crossed into Red Dragon territory.
- Jian Jane

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Holidays in Hong Kong operate via the Chinese calendar, so dates, such as that of the Chinese New Year, are constantly shifting between the more globally accepted Gregorian calendar months. Chinese New Year falls between January and February of each year, but the celebration is known to spill over weeks before and after. The lesser-known Tin Hau birthday festivals celebrating the Chinese sea goddess happen every April and May.

- Tin Hau celebrations are a big deal for local pirates. Most of us believe that having the favor of some kind of deity keeps us safe when we're doing our business. Tin Hau remains the most popular, though among the pirate outfits she tends to go by the name Mazu. There are almost fifty temples or shrines dedicated to the water lady on Hong Kong Island alone.
- LoTide

CRIME SCENE

Given the number of Japanacorps that operations here, you would expect the Yakuza to be big and brash in the streets. However, it is the Triads that sit atop the criminal ladder. The Triads, who believe Hong Kong to be their natural habitat, are not willing to back down to any *gwailo* organization, and certainly not to each other. As a result you see a lot of public conflicts, especially late nights at the clubs. It is to the point where there is a clear delineation between what is a Triad-styled criminal enterprise and what scraps are left for Yakuza organizations to pick at. These two biggest groups don't leave a lot of room for other organized crime groups to function, but the Vory has still managed to establish a dwarf-sized foothold here, especially in the garment industry.

WHERE TO SHOP

Shopping is the highlight of downtown. No matter what legal goods and services you're looking for, the place to start is the IFC Mall. For those with more specialized tastes, **Chrome** deals in high end cyberware while the **Universal Omnitech** flagship store is known for having the best deals and gear you can come by legally in the city.

On occasion runners might find themselves needing to look or act high end. **The Armoury** is the place to look for bespoke suits and menswear while enjoying old British flair and service. Likewise, **Inagiku**, inside of the Four Seasons, is the most popular destination for fine dining.

When it's time to taste some of the local flavor, there are options for every credstick color. **Sevva Nightclub** overlooks the Sevva towers and is known to be the hangout destination for top corp personnel across the spectrum. **The Red Cellar** isn't much to look at, but the manager, Shelly Dae, books some of the best acts in the business before they go super nova. Maria Mercurial played half a dozen shows here, even returning after she made it big. **D-Vine** is a crap hole of a club, but it sits along a dragon line making it popular with mages and chip heads. The place is largely left alone by HKPD because of the heavy Triad presence there.

If you're in the market for a fence, **The Exchange** in Sheung Wan claims to be able to move anything. The owner, Jin Au-Lun, is a former pirate who poured his earnings into a corner antiquities shop. He runs his fencing operation out of the basement, even moving some of the pieces he acquires as antiques. Data brokering is also big business in the scratched pearl, with many of the worst offenders operating in plain site as lawyers. **Hirsch and Crawford** is a top-notch firm with a UCAS and British client list and long history of dealing with *gwailo* shadowrunners. If you need to get your hands on something more substantial, the Smoke Circle Society runs a street-food shack called **Little Nyanyang** that also deals in weapons and armor. Ask for the number four.

- If you're willing to sift through a lot of drek to find a prize, visit Central Station. Down in the lower levels of the station you can find a squatter's mall of street urchins selling goods they've "found" on the tracks and platforms of the cities extensive subway network.
- The Neon Samurai

WHERE TO SQUAT

You can throw a bullet downtown and hit an overpriced hotel advertising itself as the "pearl of" something or other. It is considerably harder to find reasonable accommodations and harder to still to find ones that aren't going to check your SIN. If you have the creds or the chops to trade service for refuge, there's a few places you can still squat.

Fangzi Dun is a no-frills mid-level doss that used to be a hostel until it came under the control of the Yakuza. The group cleaned it up, bought out the adjoining buildings, and turned it into a legitimate boutique hotel. The name has become a bit of a joke, as it literally translates as "squat house."

Madame Wu, owner of the **Fortunate Son Brothel**, has been known to allow runners overnight stay providing they exchange the rent for work

Blackthorne had a corp mage job until machinations dumped him on the streets of Hong Kong with revenge on his mind.

- Renton Flats on Bowen Road takes creds and doesn't ask questions. It's an apartment building, but the rooms are all for short-term rent, allowing the slumlord to drive up the prices and make more than she would if she followed the normal rules of renting. Prices are by the week, even if you just need to crash for the night. She charges more than what the doss is worth, but she doesn't ask questions and doesn't complain about what goes on behind closed doors. Most clientele vary from pirates on shore leave to gangs looking for a place for their joy girls to work out of to corps stashing potential employees as they transition from an extraction.
- Findler-man

YOU WON'T FIND THIS ANYWHERE ELSE

Hong Kong's puppet government works out of the **Government House** complex. This classic set of buildings is based on Roman and British architecture but modernized to reflect the latest in security innovations.

The security is tight, not so much because of the government officials stationed there, but because the corporate executives who pull their strings visit frequently.

OPPOSITION REPORT

Cleaning up Downtown has been a priority since KE came in to take over the HKPF contract. With so much public scrutiny on this section of the city, police are trying to show that Hong Kong is safe for tourists and, more importantly, that Knight Errant will not be pushed around. This means conducting public raids against established organized crime fronts, while at the same time back room negotiations are taking place to ensure that the crime lords can continue producing profit while allowing KE to appear as if they are cleaning up the city. Unfortunately, shadowrunners take the brunt of that effort, because they are unaligned and unprotected. The unlucky, especially *gwailo*, are paraded in front of newsdrones and held up as examples of how the new HKPF is cleaning up the city.

WAN CHAI

Wan Chai is old Hong Kong where the wide roads give way to narrow streets and dark alleys. This section of the city plays host to street bazaars, traveling merchants, and hordes of tourists hoping to strike a good bargain. The area is also home to Causeway Bay, Hong Kong's answer to Harajuku culture, presenting a sharp contrast between street life and the teenybopper culture that seeks to emulate that life.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

In September Wan Chai's streets are lined with paper lanterns. There are rooftop barbecues and fire-dragon dances in the streets. The mid-autumn festival has been going on so long that it stopped being about what it started out for.

The festival began as a celebration of Chang'e, the Chinese moon goddess. It has also come to symbolize the Wan Chai uprising, a near calamity that unfolded when dozens of armed metahuman parents stormed a local school building, demanding equal education for their children. HKPD Special Detail was poised to raid the school, bringing a violent end to the standoff, when everything stopped. A feathered serpent appeared roaring in the sky. The serpent passed across the moon, distracting both sides long enough that reason was able to work itself into the minds of their leaders, bringing an end to the standoff. The mid-autumn festival has come to symbolize and celebrate that happening. It is one of the few times in Hong Kong where you will see metahumans and non-metas walking hand in hand openly in the street.

CRIME SCENE

As you might expect, the Triads are active here, but they have to play nice. Wan Chai is close enough to Downtown that the corps want to keep it clean—in appearance, if not reality. So the Triads may run protection rackets, but they can't just go and firebomb people who don't pay up without risking corporate reprisals. Instead, any violence they direct against people who are behind in their payments is likely to be Matrix based. The quickest and easiest method is to drain merchants' bank accounts, or at least keep them from accessing them, but scrambling personnel files, re-coding IC to turn on its makers, and other forms of Matrix mischief are often seen. For a neighborhood that looks centuries old, the crime scene is decidedly modern.

WHERE TO SHOP

The majority of retail property in Wan Chai is repurposed factory space from the old industrial days. If the narrow streets weren't hard enough to navigate, most of the shops in Wan Chai don't have signs or storefront displays. The locals know where to go to find what they need, and the hipsters merely latch onto a local. There is no shopping district, so finding the store you need can be just as much a matter of luck as it is patient research. The upside to this relative obscurity is that less-than-legal operations blend in easily, making Wan Chai a popular destination for those wanting to sell and wanting to purchase illegal goods. The key to getting what you need is knowing the name of the place and slipping a few nuyen to a guide who is willing to get you there.

One place to look out for is **Munn's Dive Shop** on Wai Yip Street. The shop does a good deal of business with the local pirates who pay with whatever they bring in from the sea. **The Digital Mile** is a dilapidated row of flatted factories producing knock-off versions of popular consumer electronics.

The **International District** has an old Chinese consulate along with several other embassies and consulates that happen to feed into a street mall that caters to this diverse range of clients. Street foot from every corner of the globe is available here, especially Russian treats as several merchants hail from that part of the world. Since you can't have international interactions without intrigue, this is the place to go if you're fishing for information for government-related jobs.

Rutonjee Hospital is deep in with the corporate healthcare providers, accepting patients from both DocWagon and CrashCart. If you have a contract with either provider, you could do a whole lot worse than be taken here. If you don't have such a contract, you still might want to drop by the neighborhood, as the hospital has attracted a number of neighboring outpatient clinics and services, some of which know how to be discreet and provide services without asking intrusive questions.

Though a bit snobbish for local runners, **Fuchi Town** is teeming with overblown corporate expatriates who trade in information and can point the way to a Johnson interested in hiring. Watch your step, though—these people are suits through and through and can spot an impostor quickly. If you seem like you don't belong in corp circles, the information spigot will be shut off quickly.

The old adage is never trust an Irishman, but you can always trust an Irish pub to have some interesting people crawling around in it. **MacAuley's Pub** is a good place to have a drink and maybe meet someone who can fix you up with some shadow work.

WHERE TO SQUAT

Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple opens its doors at night as a squatter house, if you down mind the daily indoctrination and pitching in a hand or two with cleaning. If you have the creds to spend, a **Taj Hotel** is a better option. The Indian hotel chain is all but exclusive to Wan Chai, with three in the region and only two others throughout all of Hong Kong.

YOU WON'T FIND THIS ANYWHERE ELSE

The **Old Wan Chai Post Office** is the most talked-about magical hotspot in all of Hong Kong, bringing tourists from across the globe. The post office is an old white building set against a sloping street and surrounded by skyrakers. The garden behind the building has a half-dozen thorned mango trees that supposedly predate the city itself.

- Locals say the trees sprouted thorns right about the time that magic began to re-emerge into the world. Curiouser still, the locals swear that when the thorns first appeared they were bleeding. Imagine the crazy kind of magic that could make that happen.
- Bright Bird

- It's best not to talk about magic you don't understand.
- Laughing Man

Southorn Playground is like the Rucker in NYC, a basketball mecca for up and coming young talent. Unfortunately it is also Triad held territory and the site of a great deal of gang violence.

OPPOSITION REPORT

Knight Errant is a significant force here, through response times are not quite as rapid as they are Downtown. While KE might be your more immediate concern if you are pulling a run here, don't forget to keep an aye out for vengeance coming your way from the Triads. The Red Lotus

EASTERN HONG KONG

Just to the east of Downtown are two good-sized mountains, Mount Parker and Mount Butler. These act as a natural barrier between the chaos of Downtown and the more placid outlying areas. The proximity to Downtown shapes them, of course, but they also are, in their own ways, quite different from each other in their mutual isolation. Taikoo Sing is the most developed of the three communities here, with modern housing, shopping malls, and quality security. Wuxing execs are especially fond of this community. Shaukeiwan is a former docking place for fishing fleets, and now it has been given over to fishing fleet kitsch. There are plenty of fishing nets hanging here and there as decorations, lots of charming wooden boats docked on piers, many excellent seafood restaurants, boutiques where you can purchase heavy rubber boots and waterproof jackets, and bars with colorful names such as "Johnny To's Bait Shop." With all this, there are perhaps eight people in the entire neighborhood who would actually know what to do with a fish if they managed to catch one. Even farther out is Chai Wan, which has yet to experience the same level of development as the rest of the island. I'm sure the amount of open land there makes dozens of real estate agents all across the city absolutely itchy.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Back in the twentieth century, the nation of China became the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, and October 1 became a national holiday. When Hong Kong returned to Chinese ownership in 1997, it did so at arm's distance, maintaining its own government and economic structure. Still, it had become a part of the nation, and so it adopted **National Day** on October 1 as a holiday, albeit with somewhat less spectacle and enthusiasm than is typically seen on the mainland.

You might have expected the holiday to naturally die away once Hong Kong broke from the motherland in 2015, and in many respects it did. It is not an official day off any more, and there are no big Downtown celebrations. Yet some communities with closer ties to the mainland were more reluctant to let the holiday go—and since Wuxing has plenty of employees with mainland ties, neighborhoods where they set the culture were more likely to have their own National Day celebrations. Often this was nothing more than getting together to barbecue some meat, stuff some dumplings, and/or drink wine, but with many people and families all celebrating at the same time, it felt like a holiday, even if people had to work that day.

With the subsequent dissolution of China as a nation, the holiday took on a nostalgic slant, and people took it as an opportunity to remember the China that was. That made it more serious—the drinking scaled back a little, and people engaged in more traditional activi-

ties, such as dances and making mainland foods. Additionally, fireworks displays in Eastern Hong Kong have grown more elaborate. Need a night when people are frequently looking up and there are lots of loud noises to provide aural cover? October 1 is your night.

CRIME SCENE

With the strong Wuxing connection, the Triads with the closest connection to Wuxing do the best. That means the Yellow Lotus wujen sell Awakened drugs, while the Ten Thousand Lions sell the sorts of things the upper middle class like—namely narcotics and bootleg simsense chips. The Red Dragon have a presence here, because where do they not? Their specialty is providing escorts to lonely suburban dwellers. These Triads do a healthy business here, but Wuxing and the natives don't want chaos. If violence starts to erupt in the neighborhood, the Triad personnel will quickly find themselves working on new turf. Possibly at the bottom of Kowloon Bay.

WHERE TO SHOP

One of the most important needs of people in the types of neighborhoods you find here is keeping up appearances. Even when things aren't going well, you can't let people see that something is off. That means making sure you look the part you are trying to play, sporting fashionable clothing without signs of wear. There are clothing boutiques all over Eastern Hong Kong, of course, but the markups there will suck up your credsticks like a black hole hit your pocket. If you want to dress like a corp suit but still have money for dinner, head over to **Fung Lu's** on the northwestern edge of Chai Wan. The clothing here are knockoffs, but they are some of the best knockoffs you'll ever see. Buy yourself a suit or an elegant evening gown and see how you suddenly look like a person who hasn't just gone dumpster diving for day-old dumplings.

Deeper in Chai Wan is **Excelsior Boats**, which is an overly fancy name for a place that pretty much sells dinghies with outboard motors. The prices, though, are good, and the location is close enough to the water that you can buy a craft and get off the land with ease, including in chase situations.

- The manager of Excelsior, Corinne Chang, has a family full of Yellow Lotuses. Do not under any circumstance let her or her employees know if you are working for a rival of that Triad, or you're liable to find your boat engine is full of sugar when you try to start it up.
- Chungking Xpress

WHERE TO SQUAT

Taikoo Sing needs places for the corp suits' visiting family members, and while there are plenty of chain hotels, the **HoHan Guesthouse** is more distinctive than most of these, reasonably priced (for corp-suit-frequented hotels, at least), and best of all built in an eccentric old three-story building with exterior balconies on two sides, a basement that opens onto a back road situated a bit lower than the main entrance, small staircases that the staff don't seem to know about, and other odd features. The point is, this is not the type of building you can walk into and easily predict the shortest route out. It breeds confusion in anyone who does not know it well, which makes it a great place for others to come and try to find you.

I mentioned **Johnny To's Bait Shop** in Shaukeiwan earlier. That's not just a sample name, that's a real place. It's just as corny as you'd expect, right down to noodle dishes being served in cans labeled "live bait." The food is acceptable, the portions are large, and the salt intake will make your cardiologist cry. In most circumstances there would be no compelling reason to go there—but then there's the manager. Li Pen discovered an unexpectedly fierce gambling addiction during the '76 Olympics, which left him in significant debt to the Red Dragon. The Triad has decided he can repay them by acting as a go-between for the organization and shadowrunners they wish to contract. No actual meetings between Triad Mr. Johnsons and runners are supposed to take place at Johnny To's, but if you approach Li properly, he can help you make the contacts you need to start doing Triad work. If that's what you're into.

YOU WON'T FIND THIS ANYWHERE ELSE

Cityplaza is a massive shopping mall in Taikoo Shing. It has long been the largest mall in Hong Kong, but keeping that title has not been easy. Several acquisitions and expansions were required, as well as creativity to not allow the mall to grow in a way that ended up discouraging business. By building residences on top of the mall, more potential customers were built into the area, and they started developing themed areas in the structure. Building one, which formerly was the only building holding shops, is now the teen-oriented area. This means clothing with plenty of LEDs and pop culture logos, fast-food joints, clubs that offer plenty of music and dancing without the full-on intensity of late night spots, cheap electronics stores, and so on. The building also hosts a longstanding skating rink, which is frequently crowded. Building two focuses on corp suits, three targets sporty, athletic, outdoorsy types, four is high-fashion oriented, and five is home furnishings, appliances, and décor. Each building has eight stories of shopping, all done up in sleek, shiny design. Like most malls, this isn't great for specialty goods, but if there is some sort of mass-market consumer good you're looking for and can't find, it's only because you haven't hit enough stores.

- One of the perks of the residences is exclusive elevator access to the mall space below. Since these elevators are not accessible to the general public, they are tucked away in corners rather than being large and obvious. They can be a good way to slip away from someone not familiar with the layout of the buildings.
- HK Cavalier

OPPOSITION REPORT

While the Yellow Lotus tries to keep it subdued in this area, never mistake that for weakness. Cross them, and they will not forget. Incur a debt, and they will eventually take it out of your hide. Be careful about who you're working against in this area, since the Yellow Lotus is not as obvious as they may be in other districts.

Near the docks of Chai Wan is a small gang of pirates known as the **Xingba Raiders**. They're not the ship-taking-over-type pirates, since they don't have ships of their own; instead, they dart around on personal watercraft. Rather than seize entire ships, they look to target boats that might have high-value items, including passengers carrying loaded credsticks. They emphasize speed and surprise and have been known to combine scuba-diving gang members with those on watercraft. So if you're on the waters off Eastern Hong Kong, make sure you don't just look for a large attack; keep small and quick on the mind too.

THE SOUTHERN COAST

If the culture of Wuxing employees shapes Eastern Hong Kong, the corp itself is the dominant force in the Southern Coast. No one really knows just how much of the land in this area they control through direct ownership, real-estate holding companies, and long, twisted paths of ownership where the ultimate individual in control is not easy to find (or perhaps does not even exist). While the exact amount of this control can be debated, what is clear is that the shape of the area, down to the street design and zoning laws, is directed by Wuxing. Some aberrations that go against their master plan may appear here or there, but the megacorp has plenty of means at their disposal to bring outliers back into line. Court proceedings, shadowruns, direct purchases, intimidation, outright vandalism, disrupting spiritual energies of a location, and more—they are serious about controlling the land here, especially around the **Aberdeen** district, and they will not hold anything back in order to get what they want.

- This is not to say there are no limits to what they will do. To use an extreme example, firebombing a building they don't like because it was built too tall or something might get rid of the building, but it could also disrupt the spiritual energies of the place in an unfortunate way, which would work against their ultimate designs. So they're generally not going to go as large as that.
- Daisy Chain

- Unless such dramatic changes are precisely what they want.
- Man-of-Many-Names

The focus of all of these efforts of *qi* manipulation is the **Wuxing Skytower** in Aberdeen. While parts of Aberdeen are fully developed and built up, the area directly around Wuxing's central headquarters are quaint and old-fashioned. Fishermen regularly drag their nets past the base of the tower and throw them into the water within view of top Wuxing executives. It's a strange atmosphere, but it's exactly what Wuxing wants it to be.

Adding to the strangeness of the Skytower is the fact that visible security around the tower is much less than you would see at any other megacorporate headquarters. Go to Ares's base in Detroit, for example, and you very well might see a fragging tank driving through the lobby just to make sure people know whom they're dealing with. The Skytower, by contrast, has no more physical security than you might see in an office building that's home to a number of smaller, non-rated corps. There are a few guards at the base, and a few more scattered here and there, but hardly enough to scare any dedicated shadowrunner. But it's what you don't see that will kill you. The magic activity around the tower is truly stunning—if you have the ability and want to be awestruck, go in and assense the Skytower and prepare to be blown away. Then be prepared for a spirit to manifest and start asking you politely about your business, because while they keep a close eye on everyone, the beings assigned to astral overwatch are ferocious about monitoring the Awakened who stumble into the area.

Detailing the magical security around the Skytower is impossible, because it is fluid and ever-changing, based on the state of mana and *qi* on any particular day. Suffice it to say that unless you are prepared to take on spirits and astrally projecting mages who know how to locate themselves in aspected domains for maximum effectiveness in pile-driving mana directly into your skull, then you shouldn't think about approaching the Skytower with even a milligram of hostile intent.

- Because, yes, they absolutely are scanning the auras of everyone who comes within a half kilometer of the tower, looking at auras for any trace of hostile or nefarious intent. Get your thoughts under control before you venture forth.
- Guy Lo

While the Skytower is the most important corporate building in this area, it is far from the only one. Aberdeen gets very dense in places, with representative of every AAA corporation and plenty of AAs. The buildings for each Japanacorps—that is, Renraku, Shiawase, Mitsuhama, and Yamatetsu—are significant, as they continue their efforts to batter Wuxing and gain as much influence in the city and then the mainland as they can. This seems like an unfair fight, four megas against one, but Wuxing is not alone in this fight. While they are not at the AAA or even AA level, there are plenty of homegrown corps that have enough local strength to keep the Japanacorps hopping. That, and the fact that Wuxing has the *qi* of the city working almost entirely to their benefit, helps keep the fight balanced and the shadows busy.

One notable homegrown corporation is upstart Tsang Engineering Services, which is based in a building called the **Prosperity Tower**. Don't let the rather innocuous name fool you—when they're talking about engineering, they mean any form there is, including mechanical, materials, mana, and a whole lot of other types. Their recent growth has been quite rapid, and word in the shadows says this is because they are aggressive to the point of ruthlessness.

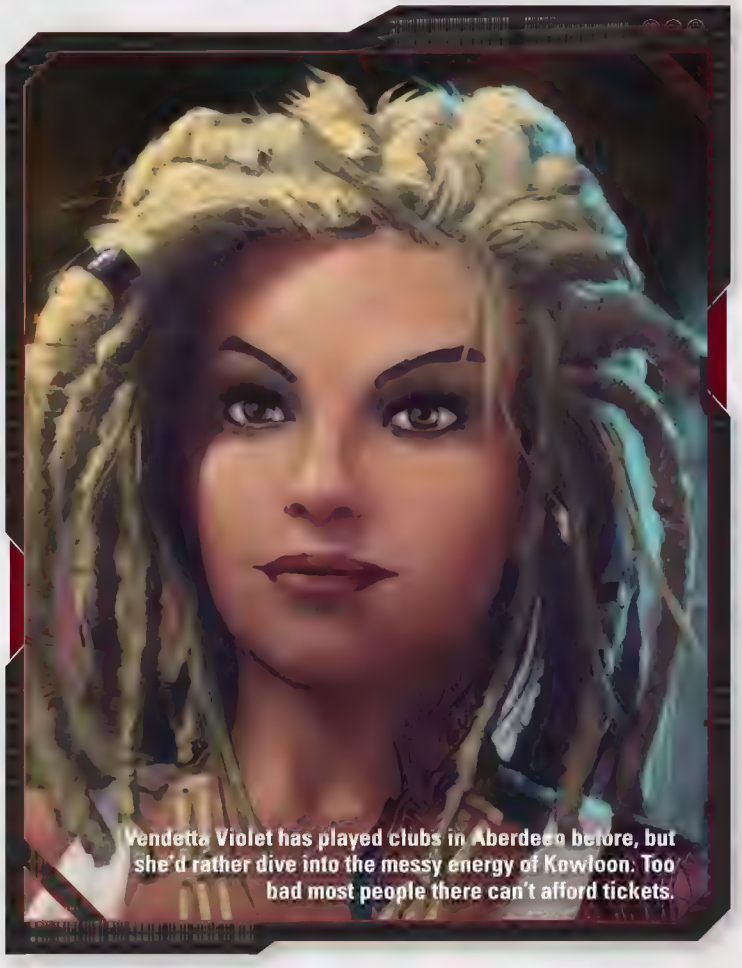
- Right, and you haven't seen true ruthlessness until you've seen someone try to exploit the metaplanes and astral phenomenon the same way most corporations exploit their workers and material resources. Not too long a guy was found wandering in the Kowloon Walled City carrying Tsang credentials. He seemed calm but a bit puzzled, and he was having trouble walking—he stopped when there were no obstacles in his way sometimes, and other times he attempted to walk through walls. When he spoke, his tone was slightly aggravated, and while individual words made sense, the sentences were incomprehensible to most observers. It took a decker who used to study quantum physics before being disgraced and kicked to the streets to figure out what was going on—the guy was seeing in four dimensions. Some kind ofTsang experiment had gotten into his head and completely rewired it.
- Hatchetman

- Yeah, that's not a thing.
- Melquiades

- Only those sufficiently untraveled in the metaplanes make blanket statements about what is or is not possible.
- Man-of-Many-Names

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Like many business-heavy districts around the world, this area tends to empty out at holidays. The execs and other powerful people who work here are spending lots of money on their fancy homes, so they occasionally like to go out and enjoy them. This can make holidays seem like a great time for a break-in, but when I say "empty out," I mean "pretty much no one but security." So if you come in on those days, you'll stick out like a sore thumb.



Vendetta Violet has played clubs in Aberdeen before, but she'd rather dive into the messy energy of Kowloon. Too bad most people there can't afford tickets.

- Just get some good fake security uniforms, then. Sheesh.
- Jade Beetle

But if you want a truly special occasion in this area, come by when the **September Effect** is in sway. Financial analysts have noted that bear markets and stock market crashes often happen in September. Some big ones have happened in October, but the thinking is that those crashes had roots in September. The explanation for the September Effect has the most delightfully human of roots: Basically, managers and traders—the sort of people who have the luxury of enjoying summer leisure time—spend the summer relaxing and pushing their cares as far from themselves as they can. Then they get to the office in September and take a look at how to gear up to make sure their year-end balance sheets are going

to look the way they should, and sometimes they found the cares they pushed aside only got worse, and maybe they shouldn't have been ignoring them. So September becomes the time of uncovering weakness and building desperation to compensate for that weakness, which can make stocks take a hit.

This means that financial districts become a little punchy in September. Traders, analysts, and leaders walk carefully, wincing in anticipation of bad news. They are much more susceptible to rumor than they are at other times of the year, because they want to be sure to get ahead of any potential disasters before they become really painful. The bottom line is, looking to use the corporate rumor mill to spread gossip quickly? There's no better month than September.

CRIME SCENE

As you might expect, Knight Errant is as responsive in most parts of the Southern District as they are Downtown, but the corps don't always wait for them to respond—they make sure they have good security staffs to take care of their own business. The exception to this are some of the areas Wuxing has allowed to remain old-fashioned and quaint; the price of maintaining their centuries-old way of life is they don't get the fast response of a modern police force. If you need to lay low fast while in the Southern District, get to a fishing village. Then see if you can arrange some water transportation.

WHERE TO SHOP

Retail is not a major focus on this area, but there are a few places to visit. The **Lone Defense** shop is geared toward corp types who want to be well armed and armored enough to fend off attacks that their bodyguards may miss—or to protect those not wealthy enough to afford bodyguards. Prices here are by no means cheap, but they frequently have new models and modifications before almost anyone else.

Omnipresence caters to the corporate obsession with espionage. By playing both sides of the fence—those who want to listen in on what others say and those who want to keep others from spying on them—the shop rakes in decent cash while keeping a certain veneer of hypocrisy for trying to defeat what they proliferate.

WHERE TO SQUAT

The **Drunken Monkey** is a rather unassuming pub, especially considering its surroundings. It has exposed wood beams and driftwood tables, and is staffed by bartenders who are mostly orks. The menu emphasizes rice and fish dishes, none of which are exactly gourmet, but the dishes tend to be satisfying. Sho Tung, a war vet, owns the place, and his presence attracts other vets, particularly those actively selling the services they built in the military. If you're looking for a merc, this is a good place to start

The **Shangri La** in Aberdeen is the largest floating restaurant in the city. It's a multi-story barge serving first-class seafood. You can find a handful of Wuxing execs eating there throughout the night, and if you approach them correctly, they might be able to connect you to Wuxing fixers looking for talent.

- Do not be direct, do not be obvious, and remember that asking for a favor is serious business in Hong Kong, where social debt is at least as serious as financial debt.
- Daisy Chain

YOU WON'T FIND THIS ANYWHERE ELSE

With a secret entrance off a dingy alley, the **Toot Suite** is small and cramped, but it's also about the only brothel operating in Aberdeen, so for corp suits who just don't want to commute, it's a welcome asset. The rooms are small but well appointed, and the staff is on the higher end, meaning they tend to be alert, proficient, and not coked up to the gills. That also means, though, they aren't heavily surgically altered, and they certainly aren't going to make themselves into bunraku puppets. So if you're looking for a very specific type, this is not the place to go. If you want (and can afford) someone quite skilled—or if you want to get some illicit snaps of the people who frequent this place—then you should drop by.

OPPOSITION REPORT

See the Crime Scene write-up above. If you're not ready to deal with what Knight Errant and elite corpsec types might throw at you, you're not ready to run on the Southern Coast.

- And don't even think the quaint fishing villages are safe. There's a good handful of Wuxing shamans hanging out there since they don't like being confined to the office building. They don't advertise their identity, so tread carefully.
- HK Cavalier

YAU TSIM MONG

It rains constantly in some parts of Yau Tsim Mong (particularly **Mong Kok**), just like in some atmospheric crime trid, but it's not rain coming from clouds. On the peninsula, a bit northwest of the island, the neighborhood hosts thousands of old window air conditioners drip relentlessly from high-rise tenements. Each unit in these tenements is only about three meters wide, so plenty of them can be packed in a single building. That density keeps the rain coming on many of the streets,

though sometimes the drips are blocked by the laundry hanging on lines stretched between buildings.

Down below, on street level, almost nothing is permanent. What would normally be storefronts in other communities are empty spaces with no front windows or doors, places where a merchant can back a wagon in and then act like it's a real store. The next day some other merchant will occupy the space, but while there's a lack of permanency, there's no lack of people trying to make some nuyen. You'll see all sorts of hustling and selling going on. Live chickens, dead chickens, coral jewelry, hand-carved trinkets, knockoff handbags, fruits and vegetables grown on empty lots, and much more are for sale. Most of it won't be of interest in the job (unless you need some street dumplings, and you probably do), but along with the food and drink, you can also find a touch of magic in the "poor mystic's market" of the **Yau Ma Tei** neighborhood. Will you find something powerful there? No. Do you have a chance to pick up some reagents on the cheap amid the worthless rabbit's feet? Yep.

This area is not all endless rain and crowding, however. **Tsim Sha Tsui** is not luxurious by any means, but it feels positively airy compared to Mong Kok. Even nicer is **Yau Tsim Mong**, which holds the Golden Mile of hotels along Nathan Road, a stretch not as nice as the island's Wanchai-Causeway, but still plenty luxurious.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Yau Ma Tei may not be cash rich, but no one celebrates the Chinese New Year like they do here. They give it everything they have, meaning all the best food they can get their hands on comes out to be cooked, and anyone with a milligram of magical talent contributes fireworks or dazzling illusions to the party. It's big, loud, and doesn't stop for a week. You owe it to yourself to check it out, even if you're not using the noise and lights as a cover to help you lay low.

CRIME SCENE

Some estimates haves said as many as one as six Hong Kong residents are Triad members. In many cases, this membership is casual, nothing more than a badge of identification indicating your ultimate allegiance in case drek happens to get real. But Yau Tsim Mong is one of those areas that drives any averages up higher. Are fifty percent of the people here Triad-affiliated? Maybe. Whatever the actual number may be, you're not going to take a single step in this area without someone affiliated to a Triad noticing. Keep in mind that unless you live in the community for a good long time, you will never keep up with the shifting politics and allegiances between the Yellow Lotus, Red Lotus, Red Dragon, Ten Thousand Lions, Black Chrysanthemums, the 289 Gang, and Smoke Circle Society, so be very careful playing games or seeing if you can direct one rival against another, because what you thought were rivals might have turned to friends, or at least allies of convenience. The ground is as changeable as water.

- To a degree, but the Yellow Lotus and Red Dragon have the backing and power to stay on top, and the Black Chrysanthemums will always be ruthless enough to make no one ever fully trust them. Those things are set in stone. The rest is chaos.
- Guy Lo

WHERE TO SHOP

The shops in Mong Kok or Yau Ma Tei do not have permanent addresses or actual names. You simply have to keep looking for the right merchant. A few notable sellers to look out for: **Cheung Wen** is an ace scavenger, picking up valuable things from the dumpsters of the rich and powerful. Most of the time it's clothing and accessories, but sometimes he finds pocket secretaries and the like that he doesn't know how to crack, and he sells them without erasing them. It's a crapshoot, to be sure, but sometimes you can find some valuable information stowed away on these things. **Wendy Bing** has the expected amount of worthless trinkets and fake magical items, but she also occasionally gets a real treasure. She seems to have connections to a crew of scuba divers who regularly explore the wreckage in the various bays of the sprawl and sometimes come up with something whose worth they don't understand, so they sell it far too cheaply. So if you're looking for something long lost underwater, or want to make a connection to someone who can help you retrieve lost treasure, Wendy is worth finding.

Along with plenty of hotels, the **Golden Mile** offers a wealth of shopping. The northern end has cheap electronics—beware the knockoff that stops working a minute after you turn it on—the stretch near Yau Ma Tei has a wide selection of exotic birds and the expected faux telesma, just past that you'll see the Jade Market (you can guess what that contains), and once you get into the southern stretch, you find the touristy drek you shouldn't drop a single nuyen on. Maybe you can steal something for the folks back home, if you really need to.

WHERE TO SQUAT

The **Golden Mile** is loaded with places to stay as well as shop, and at the top of the heal is the Peninsula Hotel. Each room is distinctive, with fantastic waterfront views, and service so attentive that you feel like a sucker for using your own legs to stroll around.

If you look carefully around Mong Kok you might be lucky enough to find a merchant with a stained white hat who answers to the name of **Noodleboy** standing over a vast pot of noodles. He is silent, simply filling orders and not engaging in small talk, and he probably could work in a high-class restaurant if he had better communication

skills and wanted something more than what he has. That does not appear to be the case, however, so Mong Kok enjoys a regular serving of some of the tastiest five-nuy-en-a-bowl noodles you'll ever find. The 289 Gang are particular fans of these noodles, and they often use the spot as a place to do business, which includes fencing recently obtained goods. This tends to happen in the early morning hours, just before the four a.m. closing time, so if you need a fence, that's when to arrive.

- The fences are also willing to quickly turn around some of the stuff they receive, so the setting around the shop becomes an impromptu black market. If Noodleboy notices any of this, he doesn't seem to care.
- HK Cavalier

If the spots on the Golden Mile aren't in your budget, you might instead look for one of the **Dynasty Mansions** found around this district. The name, as you might guess, is deceptive—the rooms would only be considered to be of mansion quality for certain species of beetle. Which you may well find in the rooms. The rooms are slightly bigger than a coffin, meaning you can stand in them, but they make most college dorms look roomy.

- Yeah, good analogy, since we've all spent a lot of time in college dorms and have that as a frame of reference.
- Ching-Ching POW

YOU WON'T FIND THIS ANYWHERE ELSE

The narrow streets and alleys, crowded tenements, laundry lines, power lines, and more give this district more intriguing possibilities for vertical movement than you'll see practically anywhere else. If you want to maximize the use of this space, though, you need to know the local intricacies, and the person to teach you is **Wen Su Yi**. She teaches parkour-like classes to those who can, in her terms "provide interesting compensation." She lives and teaches on top of one of Mong Kok's tenements, and the first test for any prospective student is to get to street level from the top of the building in less than ten seconds. Without, of course, magical or wingsuit assistance.

OPPOSITION REPORT

As I mentioned above, Yau Tsim Mong is Triad territory, so if you do anything to make the Triads angry, retribution will be swift and harsh. Watch your step. Plenty of shadowrunners have dosses here, because it tells the world that no matter how desperate they are, they don't have to resort to Kowloon City. Speaking of which ...

KOWLOON CITY

Every sprawl has a place like this. A place that corp suits use as a cautionary tale, telling their children and themselves that their lifestyle may have drawbacks, but at least it's better than *that*. A place where, when an emergency call comes in, Knight Errant dispatchers roll their eyes at the address, say a little prayer on behalf of the victims of whatever is going on, and do nothing else. A place where you can dump corpses in an alley and know they'll be scoured to the bone by urban wildlife by morning. A place that makes hell seem like a welcome alternative.

This is Kowloon City. There is no rule of law here, just gangs claiming turf and enforcing whatever rules strike their whims. There is electricity on most days, but not necessarily for twenty-four hours. There are weird stains, foul smells, bad tempers, rusty weapons, angry spirits, toxic dumps, and corrupted mana that makes you taste foulness in the air. As a runner I know named Dangerfield says, it's bad, I tell you. Bad.

Hung Hom is the nicest of the spots in this area, as far as these things go. It used to be filled with shopping malls and an amusement park, but those are all dilapidated and inoperable. Urban tribes have settled into these areas, repurposing them into shelters and miniature villages, scavenging anything of value they can find, and fighting each other to stave off their everyday boredom.

Old Kai Tak used to be an airport, but the only craft that land there now are occasional t-birds landing with smuggled merchandise, which is promptly sold at the open-air market that now dominates the area. The merchants here take full advantage of the lack of police attention to Kowloon to engage in all sorts of criminal entrepreneurship. Smugglers and thieves sell weapons, counterfeiters sell credsticks and knockoff electronics, snoops sell illicit recordings to potential blackmailers, makers sell the gear for custom explosives, and so on. Mixed in with all this are some junk merchants and tinkerers who have worthless goods 999 times out of 1,000, but if you're lucky enough to find that one outlying time, then you can get an absolute bargain.

Then you have the worst of the worst, the **Walled City**. Take the desperation of any given slum, add criminal overlords with deep pockets and a complete willingness to rule through terror, throw in twisted spirits who keep the residents from sleeping at night with their brain-melting screeches, and you have perhaps the worst the Sixth World has to offer, which is an extraordinary statement.

- It's the spirits that really help put the walled city over the top, misery wise. They are mad, desperate things, and they seem to enjoy dwelling among beings as mad and desperate as they are. So if they don't sense that level of insanity, they try to create it. They feed off hope, dreams,

and happiness (assuming they can find such things in the Walled City). They turn souls to dust. They are nightmares, and we live in a world where some people have no choice but to live next to them.

- Daisy Chain

- There are spirits who feed like animals, but the most significant worry is those who hold their leashes.
- Man-of-Many-Names

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

There are no real annual celebrations in Kowloon City. The days blend together for most of the residents, and they don't always have a firm grasp on what day or month it is. While they aren't scheduled at all, the city is home to the occasional **Fourth Harvest** celebration. The various Triads have all sorts of opium poppy growing facilities, both natural and enclosed. The typical poppy growth cycle takes one hundred and twenty days, meaning a nice and even three harvests per year. But scientists and shamans have managed to shorten the cycle at times, some years getting it as short as ninety days. That means four harvests in a year instead of three, and the extra drug supply brings in revenue that make the Triads giddy. This leads to a large party, and anyone who notices the celebration is invited. For the Kowloon residents, this means free food, free drink, live music, and a very welcome break from their daily lives. The nature of the celebration means it tends to happen toward the end of the year, but sometimes when the first three cycles end early enough, some Triads go ahead and throw the celebration early, when the fourth crop is planted, meaning you might catch a celebration in early October.

CRIME SCENE

Honestly, the whole place is one big crime scene, but the places you need to focus on are the hubs, where some criminals hold sway over many of the others. And no hub in Kowloon is more central than **Kindly Cheng's Mahjong Parlor**. Don't look for Kindly Cheng's name on the neon outside—she doesn't need any more publicity—and don't expect a warm welcome if you're going in without an introduction. If you make it in, remember that Kindly Cheng has strings connecting to dozens of fairly powerful criminals, who in turn command hundreds of foot soldiers. Kowloon City seems chaotic, but if there's one person who can line up all the people in that chaos and make them dance, it's Kindly Cheng.

- Don't make the mistake of thinking that Kindly Cheng's power is only the punch-and-shoot kind of thing. She has solid Awakened forces available, but where her contacts truly excel is decking. Kowloon City may seem technologically backward, but Cheng has the resources to mess around with some of the most secure nodes in the world. Never underestimate her.
- Young and Fat

WHERE TO SHOP

Not many people come to Kowloon City as a desired destination, but for shadowrunners, the **Chop-Chop Shop** is a definite draw. With the Black Chrysanthemums supplying the goods, the 'ware available at this place is very good quality (though some cyberlimbs harvested from opponents have seen a little more wear and tear than would seem ideal). Still, the goods are quality, which brings in traffic even though the docs inside have a reputation for being ... erratic. Hey, if they were highly skilled, they'd have a regular job.

The **Kai Tak Black Market** was mentioned above. Special mention needs to be made of its weapons selection; if you're lucky, you can find things that are only made available to militaries and prime corpsec groups. Won't happen much, and you'll pay for it, but it's still more of a chance of buying some of these things here than you'll get anywhere else. They have connections to pirates that wander the hidden coves of Kowloon Bay, and those pirates are quite skilled at steering themselves toward and lifting valuable cargo.

WHERE TO SQUAT

Don't. Just don't. Go find a Dynasty Mansion in Mong Kok. Or sleep on the rocks in the bay. Don't spend the night here. You're worth more than that.

YOU WON'T FIND THIS ANYWHERE ELSE

In case this wasn't clear yet, Kowloon City contains every form of criminal activity known to metahumanity, so that includes prostitution and its dark cousin, human trafficking. You won't see a sign for **Mamasan Laan's** brothel; you'll know it when you see Mamasan, a shrewd dwarf, greeting customers inside. Don't try to assense her unless you want to study how a metahuman soul can buy and sell people who have barely experienced anything in life, and somehow not feel a twinge of conscience. But if you can get past that, her place is a degree or two nicer than her surroundings.

Did I mention that the mana around Kowloon City is often severely messed up? Well, so are the people, and they have found interesting ways to exploit the weird mana. A wujen named Lei organizes fights between street wizkids and Awakened Triad members, holding them in spots where the mana makes for intriguing and occasionally disastrous spellcasting. The ever-changing location for the fights is called the **Six Demon Bag**, and you won't see advertising for it—strictly word of mouth.

- These fights are *hard*—Triad spellslingers are pretty skilled, and the oddly flowing mana means you really need to be on your toes. This means Lei can't just scrape anyone off the street and throw them in the arena. He needs people with some real skills. So if you're scouting for talent, watching a Six Demon Bag fight is a good idea. Just hope the recruit you're looking at survives.
- Guy Lo

The people of Kowloon need religion as much as anyone in the world, and the massive temple complex gives them the chance to worship in a wide variety of fashions. In the middle of the complex is the **Wong Tai Sin Temple**, which hosts a stream of the especially poor and desperate (though how you sort them out from the rest of the district's residents is not simple). The visitors generally have things in their mind other than architecture, but more alert observers have seen that an entire wing of the temple is sealed off. And the Awakened among those observers have taken one look at the mana flow around the place and then switched off their astral perception, saying that the mana looks, and I quote, "ill," "gangrenous," and "as rotten as month-old milk poured inside a decayed corpse and laid on a sheet of metal in the hot sun." That's enough to make some people curious about what's in the sealed-off portions. It's enough to make me want to avoid it.

- Record-keeping is, of course, terrible in Kowloon City, and most people have few family members or even friends keeping track of them. Also, the area is an excellent place to disappear into. Those caveats out of the way, I've heard more than one rumor of people disappearing after the temple being their last known destination, so I'm worried the rot there is affecting more than mana.
- HK Cavalier

OPPOSITION REPORT

The Triads have a presence in Kowloon, of course, but they are not as organized as they are in Yau Tsim Mong. A lot of that has to do with the quality of people available—while Yau Tsim Mong is full of poverty, it is also full of people trying to strive for more, or at least giving their all to maintaining what little they have. Kowloon City is where people have slid to rock bottom, and they often are not in a condition to do much of value, even observe the activity around them. It's true that Kindly Cheng has an impressive network, but she can't see into all of Kowloon's dark corners and hidden byways. Still, make sure you don't draw her attention, as you do not want to be on the wrong side of her. The uncontrolled magic of Kowloon is perhaps an even more significant threat, as we just don't know what kind of spirits are out there, what they want, and what they'll do to people who cross them. Or encounter them. Or whatever. So keep your distance.

TOLO HARBOR COMPLEX

Feel comfortable with the military? Great. You'll love Tolo. It's home to the Marine Authority and Special Forces Police, as well as top-notch Ares forces, such as Firewatch. The place reeks of military. Not comfortable with the military? You'll fragging hate it.

The two groups—Ares and non-Ares—don't interact too much. The Marine Authority and Special Police Forces are based more in **Sha Tin**, which has the rough feel of a place serving people who don't care what's around them and what they're drinking from, as long as it isn't leaking their drink on the ground. Broken windows are often left unrepaired, since there's a good chance something or someone will be flying through them again soon enough. Think about any bar that's been invaded by sailors on shore leave, then think about a whole stretch of bars like that, with that same atmosphere every day of the year. That's Sha Tin.

Tai Po, by contrast, is more controlled and disciplined. It's not exactly tourist heavy, but Ares knows it's still part of the face they present to the world, so they want it to look right. Plus, the nature of the people recruited for the forces based here is to be a little stiff and detailed, and the surroundings reflect that. The problem with that is that sobriety is a little higher here than in Sha Tin, which means vigilance is correspondingly higher. Unless you disguise yourself well, you're going to get noticed.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

There's one special occasion, and it's called "off duty." It happens regularly, and the bars are glad it does.

CRIME SCENE

Low. There's some smuggling that happens, since soldiers often want things they're not supposed to have, but it's often low-level stuff, like bootleg trids. There is plenty of fist-fighting when enough liquor is flowing, but the damage typically doesn't amount to more than bruises. Theft is low, gang activity is non-existent.

There is, however, military gear, including prototypes in testing, so espionage happens. The military police are well aware and are vigilant about spies, but their astral security isn't great. Smart runners take advantage of that.

WHERE TO SHOP

You don't. There aren't stores, there are quartermasters, and unless you have the right identification, they won't give you anything.

WHERE TO SQUAT

There is not a whole lot to speak of in terms of hotels, but there are restaurants, and there are plenty of watering holes. In Sha Tin, the **Sunken Junk** is not the loudest, most crowded, or most raucous place, but it attracts

a lot of the people who do the actual business of the base—requisition officers, people arranging transport, people supervising field-testing of new weapons, etc. They have the sort of information shadowrunners love, and the atmosphere allows for conversation.

Hitting a bar in Tai Po is a little trickier. People know each other pretty well over there, so if you're an unfamiliar face, you'd better have a rock-solid reason for being there; "I was in the neighborhood and thirsty" ain't gonna cut it. If you can work up a good cover, **Jing Pu's** is a good place to go. It's favored by enlisted personnel, giving them a nice chance to swap horror stories about their superior officers. Listening in on those stories can provide valuable intel about what's going on at the base.

- I like the "Ares R&D team checking on progress" cover story. You get to look like a civilian, and you get to ask questions about the things you really want to know about. Just don't get caught sounding ignorant about the things you're supposed to have developed.
- SunnyTzu

YOU WON'T FIND THIS ANYWHERE ELSE

The towns here are about more than just training and sheltering military personnel—there's also research on the best tools for dispatching enemy personnel. They do not label these facilities clearly, so you can't look for a neon sign reading "Military Weapons Development" or anything. Rumors say that a grey building with narrow windows known as **"Facility J"** is developing the weapons that soon will be in the hands of Firewatch troops on the range. Those same rumors say the outer walls of the building are a shell, filled with security measures to pass before you get to the smaller R&D lab inside.

OPPOSITION REPORT

Did I mention the military? They're armed, highly trained, and everywhere. Watch your fraggin' step.

KWAI TSING

Kwai Tsing doesn't have the glitz of downtown, the wealth of some of East Hong Kong, the beauty of Lantau Island, or the remarkable squalor of Kowloon, but don't make the mistake of overlooking it. As a major transportation and shipping hub, much of the wealth that enters Hong Kong comes in here. Electronics, appliances, high fashion, on and on—if it's something people want to pay money to get, it's coming through here.

- That includes drugs, licit and illicit. Smuggling in illegal goods is done almost as smoothly as processing normal goods, as the powers involved have no desire to allow the laws to get in the way of limiting profits. And "those involved" are not just the Triads—the corps get a significant piece, too.
- Hatchetman

Joerocks2031 will patch up anything you have with a circuit board that's not working right. He might even make it work better that it ever has. He also might make it fry your fingers every time you touch it. It's a crapshoot, life is.

Major facilities include the **Container Port** of Kwai Chung, the Mitsuhama-owned port on **Tsing Yi Island**, the mostly automated port of **Ying Chau**, and the busy **Chek Lap Kok airport**. Combine this with a load of highways and bridges, and you get a continual flow of people and goods.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Material goods don't care about holidays and such things, and they don't stop flowing in because some measly humans want the day off. This area functions twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. It celebrates as much as a robot.

CRIME SCENE

Smuggling, smuggling, and more smuggling. Some people prefer to fly illicit goods by t-bird to Kowloon

City, others like to let pirates sneak them in through one of the bays, but plenty of smugglers hide in the open, figuring that false-bottom crates, bribed security, and other tried-and-tested techniques are the best ways to get things where they're not supposed to be. Theft, of course, is regularly attempted, and there is far more energy put into stopping that than eliminating smuggling. Just remember that anyone who has power in the city, including the megacorps and Triads, will miss gear of theirs that goes missing, and don't expect them to take it lying down.

WHERE TO SHOP

With all the trucking and automated port facilities in Kwai Tsing, riggers are everywhere, and **Spinning Wheels** is there to serve them. They've got the best drone selection in town, as well as a complete line of modifications. They'll even help you install those mods, providing you're willing to admit you won't do it yourself.

WHERE TO SQUAT

Plenty of restaurants and hotels sit near the airport. The **Bronze Wok** is notable for a club of plane watchers who meet there regularly. Enter into conversation with them cautiously—their obsession with plane arrivals and departures, and their wealth of knowledge about airline schedules, go far beyond the level of interest of most people. But sometimes you need to know flight information without going to the airlines for data, and these guys are the ones to talk to. They're also valuable for information about planes that took off and landed without being on any official schedules.

Most of the hotels in the area have at least some convention facilities, but for some reason the **Imperial Sovereign** hotel hosts the strangest array of gatherings I've ever seen. Sample gatherings from the past few months include: YetiFetiCon, a gathering of people with a fetish for yetis; the Magic of Pets, a conference discussing the best ways people can use spellcasting abilities to help their pets; Spirits of the Past, a convention where people summon spirits purporting to be ghosts of historical people from the past; and New Wyrm Order, a meeting for people to discuss how dragons are actually aliens who came to conquer Earth. So if you need some esoteric information, drop by the Imperial Sovereign and see which particular court is in session.

- The Spirits of the Past thing is obviously not what it's supposed to be, as that's not what spirits are. I've also heard both spirits and attendees making glaring historical errors that even a school kid should know better than to make. I think there's something else going on there—maybe some form of coded messages being passed between attendees and the metaplanes.
- Wayne Chung

YOU WON'T FIND THIS ANYWHERE ELSE

For the most part, the automated report of Ying Chau works just fine, but they can't always anticipate human error. Sometimes poorly packed containers simply don't move correctly on the automated equipment; usually, a correction can be made, but sometimes the crate slip before the drones and trucks can adjust. On top of that, you sometimes get crates that are improperly labeled, which is a special problem when the materials are dangerous and poorly packed. All this combined in one incident in 2053, when an industrial solvent container sent a drone off balance, spinning the container onto a crate carrying chemicals destined for a food research lab. Both containers broke, and the resulting chemical reaction started dissolving the floor of **Warehouse 67** immediately. The first drones sent to clean up the situation malfunctioned after contact with the toxic blend. Eventually the liquid residue was cleaned up and the damaged floor was repaired, but stories claim the toxic blend sunk in deep and has not been fully excised. Twisted spirits are said to occasionally appear in the warehouse. The drones don't seem to mind, but the rare human in the area has been spooked.

- I'm worried they're just going to ignore this because the drones don't worry about it. You let spirits like that go unmolested for too long, and they get bolder. Once they get bolder, that doesn't mean anything good for any of us.
- Daisy Chain

OPPOSITION REPORT

While many pirates are based out on Lantau Island, others prefer to keep their operations close to Kwai Tsing, so they can be ready in case something of extra value passes through. Their information sources, whatever they are, are solid, so if you are bringing something valuable through the ports, be ready for them to come after you. With airplanes being a bit more difficult to intercept while en route, the pirates tend not to be as aggressive with goods coming through the airport.

LANTAU ISLAND

Besides the skyline, the image of Hong Kong that most outsiders have seen is the twenty-six-meter-tall statue of Buddha that sits near Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island. This, as well as the nature preserves, bring plenty of tourists to the island. Which also means pickpockets. But besides the monastery, the island is mostly untamed, and since the Awakening, untamed areas come with extra challenges. In particular, a few unicorns have been spotted, leading to unicorn poachers wandering to the island. The Hong Kong government is extremely interested in preventing the poachers from bagging a

unicorn, and they have a squad of Awakened rangers keeping an eye on things.

- These rangers almost always operate astrally. If you're looking for them physically, you're looking in the wrong place.
- Daisy Chain

On the negative side, afancs have been spotted near the shores of the island. If you're thinking of going swimming there, don't.

- Also applies if you're thinking of moving a dinghy to shore by pushing it instead of letting the engine do its work. The noise reduction is not worth it.
- HK Cavalier

- The island's pristine state is fine and all, but if you look at the location and the quality of the landscaping, you have to know the corps are not going to let it stay undeveloped for long. I foresee luxury housing and corp resorts dotting the place within a decade or so.
- The Chromed Accountant

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Buddha's birthday, which tends to fall in late April or some point in May, is obviously a big deal on Lantau Island. Bathing Buddha rituals, where statues of Buddha are bathed with fragrant herbs and spices, take place, helping focus worshippers' minds on the cleansing they need. There are also performances of music, dance, and martial arts. The crowds can be thick, with all the pluses and minuses that come with such conditions.

CRIME SCENE

Besides the pickpockets, the crime scene on land is pretty negligible. Monks are known neither for being dedicated criminals nor high-value targets, so there is not a lot happening here. When crime goes down, the location tends to make Knight Errant response slow, but they will be very dedicated in their investigations—crimes against the monastery are viewed as being terribly offensive.

On water, the story is a little different. The darkness, the water access, and lack of people around make this a popular spot for pirates to gather. They don't build permanent structures, as that would get them noticed, but on any given night you can find at least a dozen tents holding sleeping pirates scattered around the island shore. They do not, of course, perform many operations on the island itself, but it's a fine place to plan their next move, or get away to after pulling off a job.

WHERE TO SHOP

Not a lot of options, though the monastery has a gift shop to meet all of your incense needs.

WHERE TO SQUAT

Again, few options here, but the monastery has a vegetarian restaurant, should you need to eat before returning to the mainland. As you might expect, the clientele is very touristy.

YOU WON'T FIND THIS ANYWHERE ELSE

Po Lin Monastery—what more do you need?

OPPOSITION REPORT

The monks, with their gentleness and genuinely contended air, are easy to overlook, but don't make that mistake. Some of them are Awakened, and while they tend to focus on health and defense spells, they are skilled enough to make life difficult if you draw their attention to whatever run you might be doing in a monastery in the middle of a nature preserve.

The pirates of Lantau mostly want to stay out of your way, but if you stumble on one of their campsites, they're going to be very diligent in finding out what brought you there. It's better to let them see you in the first place than to have to take on the brunt of their suspicions.

BENDING THE MACHINE

If you're going to attempt to run the mean streets of Hong Kong, you need to know who else is out there. People who might be of use to you, people who might stop you from what needs to be done, and people who might be a friend one minute, foe the next. Here's a rundown of some crucial people who have reached into the churning machine that is Hong Kong and managed to bend it to their will.

SHADOWRUNNERS

YU LONGWEI

(MALE TROLL)—FIXER

In the harsh shadows, most runners usually fall into one of two categories: those who die young (and usually horribly) and those who actually *make it*. Longwei "Long Gun" Yu fell into the latter category, but paid a heavy price for it.

An expert in heavy weapons and close combat (or as he calls it, big booms and head bashing), Yu was one of Hong Kong's prime runners. When a runner team needed some heavy fire support, or a door smashed in, he was the one they wanted. And in a fight he was a holy terror. Depending on the situation, he could use his Panther Cannon like it was a precision sniper rifle, or with his Vindicator put up a wall of lead so thick it would make a dragon flinch.

- Okay, hyperbole aside, Yu was one of the best behind a mini-gun. I worked with him a few times, and he's always been a constant pro, except that he had the odd habit of chanting Tibetan prayers while he was in combat. That triple-bass voice of his, it sounded like a demon was coming for you. You got used to it, but it was kind of unnerving at first. Guess that was the point.
- HK Cavalier

Business was good for Yu and he enjoyed every moment, be it the rush of combat or the victory parties afterward. Yu was at the top of his game, and it seemed like no one would kick the king off his mountain. So of course that's exactly what happened.

Yu and his team knew that going into Long I Sao's pirate cove would be tough. They knew it was heavily fortified, and Long employed some of the nastiest, most lethal pirates in the China Seas. But Ms. Johnson was paying them an insane payday to retrieve her son and teach Sao a lesson.

It was time to go big or go home.

Everything went as planned. Their boat slipped into the back of the cove without being detected. They managed to sneak in and quickly (and quietly) eliminate the sentries. It was early morning, and most of the crews were sleeping off a massive party from only a few hours before. So far, so good.

Then that damn gull came in and fragged everything up. Whatever it was, the damn bird was attracted to something the team's shaman had on her, and they wouldn't leave her alone. It was enough of a racket that enough of the pirates woke up and sounded the alarm. Then the fight was on.

It was a meat-grinder.

They fought their way into the compound, retrieved the kid, and made it out. Well, Yu and the kid made it out; the rest of the team were geeked as they crossed the beach to link up with a waiting t-bird. And just as Yu tossed the kid in, a mere two seconds before he could board, a rocket hit his lower back. The t-bird took off and Yu held on for dear life for thirty minutes, his legs now nothing but dangling dead meat.

He made it back, but the damage was done. His lower spine was almost gone, and it took all of his earnings from that run to reconstruct his lower body, but medical science could only do so much. He'd never be able to walk again, even with cybernetic replacement.

For some runners, this would be a slow death sentence.

- Yeah, no kidding. Most of us live run-to-run and don't have massive nest eggs or retirement funds. If you can't run, you're hosed. In situations like this, many runners simply decide to end it right there. Can't say I blame them.
- Hatchetman

But Yu was lucky; he had enough connections and knew enough of the right people to make a minor career change. Instead of running, Yu turned to fixing. These days you can find him either at the Plum Forest in Downtown Hong Kong or the Drunken Monkey along

the Southern Coast. Either way, if you're new in town and need some work, or a veteran looking for a fixer who knows what it's like to run the shadows, give Long Gun a call. He'll take care of ya.

- Chief among those connections was the Ms. Johnson who hired Yu for that fateful run. Never thought I'd see it, but this time a Johnson went above and beyond to help a runner after the run. From what I hear, she's working with a few known drone riggers to build Long Gun a custom set of drone legs. He won't be able to work the shadows like he used to, but at least he'll get out of that oversized wheelchair.
- Young and Fat

MR. DIGGLESWORTH

(MALE DWARF)— PROFESSIONAL CLEANER

For all of Hong Kong's filth, there's still a certain kind of cleanliness that needs to be maintained. This is the kind of cleanliness that involves removing small details such as dead bodies but includes all the nice bits and traces of forensic evidence that's often left behind after a post-illegal/quasi-illegal operation. It's a dirty job, but someone has to do it. And in Hong Kong, the dwarf to call for all your criminal cleaning needs is Chao Pan, or as everyone in the shadows calls him, Mr. Digglesworth.

Unlike a lot of local street scum, Mr. Digglesworth doesn't have a tale of woe or some tragic circumstance that propelled him into the dark shadows of Hong Kong's underworld. In fact, his story is somewhat bland and rather anti-climactic, comparatively speaking. He was at the right place at the right time, didn't get shot, saw an opportunity, and took it.

- So why are we talking about it, or him?
- Sunny Tzu

- Because he provides a valuable service, one that you may need to use sometime. Pay attention.
- Shen-Lo Fun

Experienced and with some sort of sense of honor, Ghost is the kind of runner Yu is happy to work with.

For over thirty years, Mr. Digglesworth was a humble night-time janitor at the Government House, home to Hong Kong's Board of Governors. The work was boring and tedious, but the pay and benefits were good enough for his needs. And without a family, Mr. Digglesworth was able to keep whatever he didn't spend on real food and plum wine. But unfortunately, Hong Kong's labor laws and policy didn't keep pace with the new realities of the Sixth World. What this meant for Mr. Digglesworth was that he was facing mandatory retirement at a mere sixty-five years old, which was closing in on him fast and is nowhere close to the age where a dwarf is ready to settle down. Not to mention the retirement package would only give him the equivalent of about sixty-five percent of previous wages.

Understandably, Mr. Digglesworth was a bit irritated—he rather liked his nice steady paycheck and mostly easy life. So when he came across shadowrunners

breaking into Government House, he simply snorted and went back to his work. That was until he noticed all the dirt and other assorted crud they were leaving in their wake; he'd seen enough trid shows and overheard enough investigators to know they were leaving a drek-load of forensic evidence. He even noticed a bit of blood on the window they came in through.

So instead of activating the alarm or calling for help, Mr. Digglesworth did what he normally does: clean up the mess. Before he could finish, the runner team came back and almost geeked him on the spot. But the team's leader was a pro and didn't want to leave any evidence. Hearing that comment, Mr. Digglesworth simply retorted that if that's the plan, they needed to do a better job at it. But he could do it for them, if they gave him 500 nuyen and made sure any record of his involvement was taken care of. The team leader, impressed with the dwarf's frankness, paid him 1,000 yen to clean up after them on this job.

- Wow, was this amateur hour or what? Getting shown up by the janitorial staff? Hope it wasn't anyone I know.
- Wayne Chung

The deal was made, and the runners were never implicated with the data theft.

A few weeks later, the same team tracked down Digglesworth. This time they needed help with disposal of a body. When HKPF eventually came to investigate, they found zero traces of forensic evidence. Eventually, word spread and Mr. Digglesworth soon found himself with multiple job offers. Having retired from public service, Mr. Digglesworth got himself a van, some specialized tools, and a crew to help him with the bigger jobs. To date, no usable forensic has ever been recovered from a location Mr. Digglesworth has scoured.

And now Mr. Digglesworth has more than enough money for his food and plum wine.

- Okay, honest question: What's to keep someone from rolling on this Digglesworth slag? I mean, he literally knows where a lot of bodies are buried. Doesn't that make a lot of people in HK nervous?
- Hatchetman

- A few reasons: One, he provides a very specialized service and is very good at it. Specialized skill is something that people try to cultivate here. Two, so far he's proven to be able to keep his mouth shut. It's a double-edged sword—should he talk he knows his days are numbered. Still, if someone tries to frag with him, he could easily tell people where the bodies are buried. That, and people just like the old halfer and want to keep him around. And do you know how hard it is to get blood and gore out of neo-shag carpeting? Digglesworth does; I've had to use him several times now.
- Doctor Bonsai

CHEN JIE

(FEMALE HUMAN)— INFILTRATION SPECIALIST

For many years, Chen Jie (a.k.a. Cat's Paw) was a legend in the Hong Kong shadows. An expert infiltrator specializing in long-term deep-cover ops, her skills went beyond the normal breaking-and-entering stuff. After a period of detailed observation and study, combined with expertly applied disguises, Cat's Paw was able to literally become someone else. Facial expressions, body language, mannerisms, vocal inflections—all were masterfully duplicated. Interestingly, no one really knows what the true Cat's Paw looked like. The only thing she couldn't replicate was a person's aura.

She would often work with other runners, taking on several roles as needed, but most often she would act as the team's vanguard, going in before the job began to run interference. Other times, she would go in solo, but hire a team to extract her when her job was done. Cat's Paw was a consummate professional, but easygoing, which made her pleasant to work with and popular with various shadow teams.

And when the truth about her came out, it was all the more devastating. There was a reason why Cat's Paw was so good at long-term deep-cover operations; in reality she was Chen Jie, an undercover cop for the Hong Kong Police Force.

Chen's four-year shadow career was cut short not by anything she did, but because of a supposed clerical error in the HKPF that moved her personnel file from a secure top-secret node to the regular active-duty one. Sure enough, a decker broke into the system and posted their findings on the Matrix, effectively blowing Chen's cover.

- That was no accident—someone deliberately moved those files so they would be discovered. The whole thing stinks of an inside screw-job. I should know, since I was the one who liberated the files. I was hired by Mr. Johnson (and no, I don't know who he is) to liberate specific files at a specific time. That isn't a coincidence.
- Digital Deamon

- Yeah, well, all that aside, the revelation of who Cat's Paw was sent a shockwave throughout the Hong Kong shadows. Chen was good; she gained the trust of a lot of runners and many of them would have taken a bullet for her. Now we're wondering how much she compromised us. Hell, with her skills, I wouldn't be surprised if she's already back and we don't know it.
- HK Cavalier

- She'd better not be. Those people who would have taken a bullet for her would now put a bullet in her.
- Guy Lo

- Look, Chen may have been a plant, but she never did anything to directly harm any of us. Hell, she risked her skin to save my sorry ass. I don't think she was putting together a shadowrunner hit-list; she was looking for something else. I'd be willing to give her the benefit of the doubt.
- Sifu Smith

- Don't expect me to work with you anymore, then.
- Ching-Ching Pow

- For what it's worth, Sifu is right. My assignment had nothing to do with jacking up runners. And I had no intention of arresting you all en masse. Please believe me when I say I would never do anything to harm those I worked with.
- Cat's Paw

- I think I speak for everyone in the Hong Kong shadows when I say: FRAG YOU!!! You even think about trying to come back and we will end you. You've been warned. Hey admins, can we get her ID blocked or something?
- Ching-Ching Pow

With Chen's cover blown, she was forced to return to the HKPF. Her current whereabouts, identity, or duty assignment are unknown. However, an internal HKPF investigation into the data leak is still ongoing.

SEH SUM

(FEMALE TROLL)—COURIER

Think of the classic courier, bobbing and weaving through traffic, maneuvering through tight spots and darting with great quickness. Then think again.

The courier known as Seh Sum (the name means "snake heart") is not fast. She doesn't have a motorcycle, or some zippy sports car. She drives a Chevy Longboard—olive green with wood-paneled sides. She prefers not to get the thing above 80 kph. If you need to get a delivery across the sprawl in twenty minutes, she is not your choice. But if you want to make sure it gets there, with the relentless force of a downhill-running freight train, this is who you hire.

Seh's route planning is the epitome of efficiency—she takes the shortest route from point A to point B, no matter what. Is there a traffic jam between her and it? She'll plow through it. Does the route take her through a hot gang war? She does not care in the least. Are there a few walls in the way? A wall is just a door with a few extra bricks.

Seh combines a great affection for armor—she can talk about all the different makes and models of personal protection—with a tough make up that allows her to soak up damage and keep moving.

- There is nothing subtle or tactical about Seh. She doesn't look for better positions, check out sight lines, or outmaneuver her opposition. She just moves, taking any divergence from her chosen path as an admission of weakness. She's really a sight to behold.
- Sam Tsung

- Come on, I'm sure she's plenty tough, but she's just a lone troll. It can't be that tough to stop her if you really want to.
- Guy Lo

- Two answers: First answer: In the end, she is a courier, handling the sort of things you might expect a courier to—datachips and the like, data that people don't want to expose to the ruthlessness of the wireless Matrix. She doesn't get to carry Faberge eggs or dragon dung or whatever. What I'm saying is, her goods are valuable, but usually not valuable enough to justify throwing an army at her or anything?

  Second answer: You don't think it can be that tough? Try it some time.
- HK Cavalier

Seh got her start with street gangs, shuttling narcotics from dealers to users. Her gang loved her, since neither the police nor rival gangs had any desire to stop her when she was on the job. Her deliveries always made it where they were supposed to—and she always came back with all the cash in return, never skimming a single nuyen. Her talents were noticed by larger and more professional gangs, and soon she was doing work for the Triads. They began using her as a kind of favor, loaning her out to organizations who needed someone reliable. While Seh may not be the chattiest individual, she was savvy enough to build relationships when she was loaned out, turning herself into an independent operative rather than a Triad lackey.

Her legend has grown enough that there is a bit of a cottage gambling industry around her. Some of it involves prop bets—things like "Seh will demolish at least five steel doors in the next week." Others are more situational—people will establish a possible obstacle, like a go-gang fight, that Seh will have to get through, and then wager how long it will take her to make it through. (There can also be side wagers, such as whether she will punch or shoot more people as she moves forward.) The bettors will wait until they have word of Seh traveling through an area that might be a good staging ground for one of these obstacles, then they'll throw it at her.

Understandably, this kind of attention is making Seh's clients a little nervous, as they are worried that the escalating obstacles the bettors are throwing at her will eventually interrupt her impeccable service record. As you might expect, Seh is not asking quarter from anyone, and she is completely determined that none of the increasing nonsense surrounding her will slow her down.

- She's all getting plenty stories spread around about her as the action picks up. My favorite says there was this one time when her shortest route took her to a rooftop, two stories high, that would take her diagonally across a whole block. She gets up there, makes it most of the way across, is about to swing from a sign down to the street, when police cars skid up underneath because the convenience store she's on top of is being robbed. She don't care, so she just drops right on top of one of the cars, pretty much crumpling the roof. The police ain't happy, plus they have every reason to think she's part of the robbery crew, so they pull on her. 'Cept one poor bastard stuck underneath the crumpled roof. They tell her to halt, but of course she don't listen—she's on the job and all. They yell again, doing their whole "Stop or we'll shoot" thing, and maybe she shrugged as she walked away, but she kept walking. So they fired, but she's got her center mass plenty armored up, and the risky-dink pistols patrol officers carry don't do a thing to her. At that point, the real robbers, figuring they got a distraction, charge out of the store and try to make their getaway. The police aren't so easily distracted, though, so they turn to the robbers, and there's yelling and shooting and lots of confusion, and in all that one of the robbers sneaks up to Seh, points a gun at her head, and tries to make her a hostage to help him get away from the police. He starts yelling his demands at the police, so he never sees the fist that catches him in the solar plexus and doubles him over. She actually breaks from her route to turn a quick circle, grab the guy by the waistband and scruff of his neck, and heave him a good three meters toward the cops. She says, "That's the idiot you need to worry about. Not me." Then she keeps walking. At that point, the police decided to let her go on her way.
- Rattletrap

- There was this one time, it was night, who knows what she was carrying, but she was taking it into the walled city, and the gangs down there had her entrance locked up, so she pulled the pin on a grenade as she was walking up to them as a message, but the gangers didn't want to look scared, so they stayed in place, and when she got a few steps away she let go lever, and a few of them took the hint, but the others were all, "Naw, she ain't blowing herself up," and she kept walking, and boom, grenade went off, smoke everywhere, clearing those gang members off nicely, and the few who survived were lying wounded in the rubble, and they saw her dusting off her hands as she kept walking away from them.
- Hopping Zombie

- No she did not.
- HK Cavalier

CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

"TONY" TANG YI

(MALE ORK)—OPERATOR, KAI TAK NIGHT MARKET

"Tony" Tang is living proof that it's not what you know, but who you know that keeps people from killing a worthless pile of walking drek who so richly deserves it. For almost a decade, Tony has been running the Kai Tak Night Market in the walled section of Kowloon on behalf of the Yellow Lotus. But before that he was just another nobody street rat.

- Too bad no one drowned that rat while he was young. It would have saved a lot of suffering. And for Kowloon, that's saying something.
- Shen-Lo Fun

The ork who eventually took the nickname "Tony" was born as just another abandoned face within the rotting cesspool known as the Walled City. A birth defect prevented him from using his right arm, and he was quickly singled out for it. Like most children in there, he joined a neighborhood gang for survival, and quickly he became the gang's omega.

An easy target, Tony never became strong, and his arm prevented him from fighting very well. He wasn't all that bright or charismatic either. Tony couldn't think or even joke his way out of trouble. What Tony *did* have was a photographic memory and the abilities to hoard and scavenge.

As his resentment for his "family" grew, Tony started a secret business where he found and did things for other people. This eventually became a network of minions completely loyal to him; he learned how to buy loyalty and power. At age thirteen, he staged a coup within the gang, killing those who tortured him and subjugating the others. He also changed his name to "Tony" because it sounded tough. Soon his influence spread—in his tiny corner of the Walled City, he was king. That is, until the Yellow Lotus found out.

But instead of taking Tony out, they saw potential and gave him an opportunity: Swear loyalty to the Yellow Lotus, give them a cut of his profits, perform certain tasks, and in return he would receive more money and power than he had ever known. It took Tony two seconds to agree. Soon he was running various operations within Kowloon with startling efficiency and ruthlessness, all of which pleased the Yellow Lotus.

From there it didn't take long for Tony to earn the number-one prize in the Walled City: control of the Kai Tak. This shadow market is the main artery from which all items came into and out of the Walled City. He who controls Kai Tak controls the city. After all he had endured,Tony relished his new position and indulged in

everything he felt he was owed. He also made sure that those closest to him were well rewarded, while those who displeased him were left with nothing. This is how Tony maintains control to this day.

- Tony is a nothing more than a psychopathic bully who finally gained power. He's also a sadistic hedonist who's into every vice known to metahumanity. And I'm not talking about things like drugs or beetles; no, he gets off on power and tormenting the weak. Young, old, male, female, if it's morally disgusting and degrading to another metahuman being, Tony gets off on it. And as soon as he's had his fun or has no other use for you, you're quickly discarded with the rest of the trash—or worse, your body is "recycled" for other uses. He's also physically disgusting, not bothering with things such as basic hygiene. Which is par for the course in the Walled City, but he's bad by even that standard. The few times I've dealt with him, I almost lost my lunch. If you find yourself in his presence, remember to wear a respirator.
- HK Cavalier

- Everyone hates Tony with a flaming passion, but no one can touch him. Yellow Lotus aside, he's created a cadre of loyal muscle who will literally kill and die for him. I swear he's like a little tin-pot dictator in there. And on top of it all, he's never left the Walled City.
- Ching-Ching Pow

- And why would he? He's got everything a degenerate would need right where he is.
- OK Fella

- The problem with people like Tony is that sooner or later, someone is gonna get tired of his shit and take him out. He did it when he was thirteen, and I'll just bet someone is just itching to do it now. Soon, they won't be able to help themselves, and then bye-bye Tony. And the Yellow Lotus won't care; they got tons of "Tonys" waiting in the wings.
- Sam Tsung

MA BOLIN

(MALE HUMAN)—SHADOW BANKER

There's something to be said about a person who can install a tremendous amount of fear into the shadow community. And what's even scarier is that person turns out to be not an optimized street samurai, initiated combat mage, or even a Triad assassin, but a *banker*.

Ma Bolin appears to be a typical Hong Kong banker in his early sixties. He owns a modest apartment with his wife of forty years and drives a ten-year-old compact car. But his small stature and grandfather-like demeanor belie the fact that he can wipe out shadowrunners and professional criminals with a few keystrokes.

So he's not an assassin in the conventional kill-people-dead sense, but he's still devastating. For decades Ma has been using his position at the First Hong Kong National Bank to cover his illicit money operations, which include general laundering and setting up several front/fake accounts. In recent years it's been the latter that has given him the most money and power.

The concept is simple. Most shadowrunners/criminals don't have SINs, so they can't open a standard checking account or line of credit. And those who do can't exactly put all their hard-earned nuyen into a standard account for fear of arousing suspicion or being tracked. Certified credsticks are one way to avoid this, but there's the chance they'll be stolen or worse, wiped clean.

What Ma offers is a way for shadow and criminal types to have something that functions enough like an account that they can easily buy the necessities of life, such as food and clothing, without fear of being tracked by a debit trail. Ma's service also provides a very secure way to use, store, and properly launder illicit funds almost instantly. All this for a mere base fifteen percent.

The program he uses to hide these shadow accounts is simple. With help from a data-fractioning algorithm, the account's data (including balance) is separated, dispersed, and piggy-backed on regular active accounts. Using another "combiner" algorithm allows this dispersed data to be re-collected and changed as necessary, allowing the account to function like a normal one. All the user needs is the combiner key code, which Ma keeps tight control over.

- Okay, Matrix jocks, does this actually work? I'm actually thinking about this.
- Just Johnny

- Yep. All you need is a large enough database to disperse it into, like say a National Bank. And because the code is so fractured, anyone reading it without the combiner key will think they're looking at the random junk code commonly generated when systems constantly re-calculate massive amounts of numbers containing more than sixteen decimal points. From what I can tell, the program itself is solid. Wish I could say the same for the operator. Oh, and speaking of, before any other deckers get any bright ideas, imbedded into the fractured code is a nice feature that will erase that fracture should anyone try to access it without the key. All it will take is one missing line of code to destroy that account. And do you really want most of the shadowrunners in Hong Kong gunning for you?
- FastJack

This is what makes Ma so dangerous to his clients. He is the sole person with complete access to the system, the literal keys to the castle, and has been showing signs of narcissism, paranoia, and possibly a psycholog-

ical breakdown. On more than one occasion, he's frozen a client out of their account for some perceived insult or breach of security protocol until "amends" were made. He's also been known on occasion to rat out his clients by creating a standard account with fractured data and then red-flagging that account. Or he's used his illicit funds to hire muscle to deal with unruly customers. It's easy to see why runners and other like-minded professionals are careful when dealing with him. Many of his shadow clients are even wondering whether the benefits outweigh the risks.

- Doesn't seem to be worth it to me. You put your hard-earned cred into this fragger's hands. What's the upside again?
- Hatchetman

- It's no better or different than using a fake SIN to open a regular account. Except that it's much harder to be tracked through it. It's not perfect, but it allows most of us to live somewhat like human beings. Still, there's also a check and balance here. We know what Ma can do to us, but he also knows what we could do to him.
- Shen-Lo Fun

- Ma hiring muscle? That seems like a dumb move that could escalate quickly. But then, I worked fast food when I was younger; I know what it's like to want to smack your customers.
- Mo Coin

SONG SHU

(FEMALE HUMAN)— PROFESSIONAL INTERROGATOR

In the shadows, secrets are valuable. And while the Matrix is currently the wonderland of secrets, there are still some things that require a more old-school approach to unlock. In Hong Kong, the person to call to retrieve those secrets was Song Wei. But four years ago, he semi-retired and relocated to Los Angeles. This left his protégé and daughter Shu to take over the family business.

- And while people wished that Wei had stayed, Shu is twice as efficient and ten times as scary. I've known people who've offed themselves rather than endure Shu's "tender graces." And often, just knowing they have an "appointment" with Shu is enough for people to spill their guts.
- Young and Fat

Both Wei and Shu are known to be Awakened. Their exact tradition is unknown but likely leans toward shamanic. And while Wei was a master of invoking both physical and psychological fear in his subjects, Shu took her father's teachings and kicked them up a few notches by adding a nice helping of sadomasochism into the recipe. She will break you down and make you beg for whatever it is she's offering. She's also well-versed in all the classic techniques such as sleep deprivation, pain (she's big on that one), starvation, waterboarding, or electroshock. The only technique she actively despises is the use of truth-inducing drugs. In her mind, if she has to resort to such measures, she's admitted that her techniques, in their own, are insufficient. Which she is loath to do.

- Doesn't mean she won't use them, however. The job comes first. It just means that the subject won't survive after she's done. Shu's a notoriously poor loser.
- Wing Chung

But her favorite method, one that usually puts people over the top, is her use of nagas. That's right, just like her father before her, Shu incorporates trained nagas into her work. Sometimes they're just in the background looking all menacing as drek, while other times Shu has them slither over her subjects for maximum fear. Rumors also persist that she has, on special occasions, fed parts of her subjects to her pets.

- Psychotic apple doesn't fall far from the tree. It's well known that Wei bartered pieces of his subjects for cooperation. Talk and you get to keep your finger, ear, or … *shudder*. Sick fraggers, both of them.
- Just Johnny

- Last year, my team and I were hired to find an AWOL government VIP. We found him, but Shu already had an appointment with him. He was missing all of his fingers and his left hand, but that wasn't the worst of it. She broke his mind. All he did was babble on about how "Mistress" was upset with him and how he desperately wanted to make it up to her. And I don't even want to think about the outfit he was wearing. Shu doesn't just break people; she uses her victims as calling cards.
- Shen-Lo Fun

Shu also makes no excuses using her stunning good looks to get what she needs. Just over 1.5 meters tall, with piercing green-grey eyes, porcelain-white skin, and raven-black hair, she wields her deadly, deceptive beauty with the precision of a scalpel. Lust, anger, self-loathing, hidden desires, shame—Shu uses them all like tools in a box without a second thought. Anyone who might be attracted to her stands to have that attraction used against them.

Technically, Shu will work for anyone, but it's well-known that she's on permanent retainer with the Red Dragons. But she's been known to work for the Yellow Lotus on occasion, especially when someone is messing with general Triad business interests. In recent months, howev-

er, Shu has been seen actively working the shadows, teaming up with several prominent Hong Kong runners.

- Hey Cavalier, didn't you run with Shu?
- OK Fella

- Owed someone a favor. After that we were even. Never again.
- HK Cavalier

Rumors about this vary, but most indicate that Shu is becoming bored with her appointments and is looking to branch out. Others say that she's actively looking for someone or thing of personal value. Whatever she's doing, coincidentally (yeah right) there's been a significant rise in kidnappings in the Free Enterprise Zone. And of course the HKPF is doing their very best to look the other way.

MANG BAAK

(ORK MALE)—TRIAD DEFECTOR

By design, the Triads don't have defectors. For the most part, you break your oath to the organization, you get broken, simple as that. Those few who manage to successfully leave the organization keep a low profile from that time on, doing their best to make sure the Triad to which they belonged can't find them.

At least, that's how most people do it. Then there's Mang Baak, who walked away from Red Dragon with his fist upraised and his eyes squinted in determination. The Incense Masterwho watched him go, Leung Wai, has frequently said he thought about shooting him in the back right then, and time has proven to him repeatedly that he should have pulled the trigger.

Mang was a simple Sze Kau, a street enforcer who worked his hoop off to keep up with his adept peers. The bits of cyber he was able to acquire over time helped, but he still trained and studied relentlessly. He believed he had found where he belonged, and he wanted to show his superiors what he could contribute to the Red Dragon's prosperity.

Life in the Triads is not easy for a non-Awakened ork, though, and he constantly saw people he had beaten in hand-to-hand fighting gain rank ahead of him. He swallowed his pride until he went on a trip into the Kowloon Walled City to collect some insurance payments from a business that had been a little tardy. As it turned out, the business owner was a dealer in cheap reagents—barely above knick-knacks, really—who happened upon some powdered black rhinoceros horn and all of the sudden thought he was hot drek. He called in some Awakened contacts he had and determined to make a stand when the Triad came to collect.

As you can guess, Mang was not responsible for astral overwatch on this job, and he couldn't be expected to see what was coming. The shaman and adept he was with were caught napping, apparently, and they didn't see it either. A quick air spirit attack knocked out the shaman, while the adept found himself in the middle of an aspected area that left her feeling like she was wading through molasses. The guns came out quick, lead flew, and by the time Mang had found a safe spot, the other two members of his crew were dead. He called in for help and was told to abandon the job and come in.

Apparently a lot of back-room conversations took place while Mang was making his way back, because once he arrived the higher powers of his branch had decided that the failure of the job rested on Mang's head. If he were truly dedicated to his Red Dragons, he would have been more alert to the ambush, or at very least would have died with them. As a show of magnanimity, the powers that be would allow Mang to live, on two conditions: He would give up any hope of future advancement, and he would sacrifice his newly obtained betaware cyberarm to a more promising Triad member.

That broke Mang. Sure, he had sworn significant oaths to the Triad, but they seemed to have no loyalty to him. He walked out.

- Except you don't just walk away from a Triad. Those oaths aren't just words—they have magical force behind them, and new recruits usually have to give a material sample to the organization, so that they can be the subject of ritual magic if necessary. Only two things happen when you try to defect: either you die, or you get away because the Triad decided to let it happen.
- HK Cavalier

- You're not giving Mang enough credit. His superiors were not the only ones making plans while he walked back to the base after the botched job. Material samples can be destroyed, you know. When Mang walked out of there, it was only after he had put his ducks in a row.
- Bai Bai

Mang left the Triad with the type of anger and bitterness that only a spurned loyalist can feel. He made it his life's purpose to mess things up for the Red Dragon, and he wasted no time getting in the job. His first stop was the reagent shop where he had almost died. He turned an enemy into a friend through the time-tested means of the promise of future profits, and then he worked to build himself a network of those who wanted to get out from under the Triad's thumb. He has enough charm and inside information that he can be very persuasive, and he has recruited many to his cause. Gambling dens have withheld a cut of their proceeds, businesses have stopped paying protection money, prostitutes have started working for new pimps, and drug addicts have cozied up to new dealers. It's certainly not enough to ruin the Red Dragon—Mang is only one man, after all—but he's made a dent in their earnings.

Perhaps worse, for both Mang and the Red Dragon, is the reckless way Mang uses his allies. The Red Dragon is not, of course, happy to lose any business, and they often flex their muscles to bring people back into the fold. Mang has not not been consistent about how he defends his network. Sometimes he throws all he can at the Triad to protect his contacts, other times he seems to just shrug and let the Triad do what it wants, which usually involves an unhealthy helping of physical violence and property damage. The reason for this is simple: He's spread himself too thin. He was so dedicated to hurting the Red Dragon that he didn't worry about sustainability, and there is no way he can protect all of the assets he has contacted. He seems okay with this, as long as he's hurting his old masters, but he's building resentment that is likely to bite him in the ass sooner rather than later.

- You're missing the genius of his plan. Yes, his allies are going to turn on him, and they will likely pay for some people to track him down and hurt him. These people will wander the sprawl looking for him, and he'll make sure they find some Triad enforcers first. Then you'll have Triad enforcers and Triad defectors in the same place, and a wonderfully violent clash will break out, all while Mang has himself squirreled away somewhere.
- Terra Cotta

- That's what passes for genius these days?
- Corsair Jane

- The main point is, this is not a brief fling for Mang. He's going to keep agitating against the Triad for a long time, whatever happens to his allies. That means he's your guy if you're looking to get under the Red Dragon's skin. And if you want to get on the Dragon's good side, Mang's head would make for a nice introduction.
- Sam Tsung

GOVERNMENT

COLONEL JAMES ZHANG

(HUMAN MALE)— MARITIME AUTHORITY CHIEF

As commander of Hong Kong's Maritime Authority, James Zhang is a constant thorn in the side of Hong Kong's more aquatic-leaning criminal elements. Aside from the considerable powers he wields through his officer and law enforcement powers, Zhang also possesses a trait that makes him especially vexing for criminals: he's an honest cop.

- That's an understatement. Many pirate and smuggler captains have tried to bribe him over the years with no success. He also has zero tolerance for graft within his command. If he even gets a *hint* that someone's on the take, he relieves them of duty until a full investigation can be completed.
- Guy Lo

A decker with a sense of justice, Vix is responsive to Mang's pleas for justice against the Triads. As long as he's paying, of course.

- Only the stupid ones get caught. There's plenty of accommodating Maritime officers out there.
- Corsair Jane

Born to a longshoreman and harbor pilot who spent their entire lives working at Tolo Harbor, James became accustomed to the sea and sailing at an early age. He also got a first-hand look at the seedy underside of harbor operations. Originally he had designs on becoming a merchant sailor to get out of Hong Kong, but those plans were cut short when a running battle between rival smugglers and shadowrunners killed his father and caused millions worth of damage to the docks.

As soon as he was old enough, Zhang joined the Maritime Authority. Upon receiving his commission, he was immediately sent back to Tolo Harbor, despite his objections. He originally wanted assignment with an interdiction unit so he could go right after the pirates and

criminals. Still, like a good officer he did his duty and did it well, using his intimate knowledge of Tolo to shut down several smuggling rings and even prevent a few shadowruns. Eventually, his success became so great that his superiors gave him the interdiction duty.

- All Zhang's superiors did was simply re-sell all the contraband for 500 percent profit. His first mistake when he went all gung-ho was thinking that his superiors shared his integrity. Was an idiot then, still is one now.
- Sam Tsung

- You kidding? They gave him interdiction duty as a way to try and get him *out* of the harbor, because he was disrupting business. It was a pain in the backside for the watch commanders to fudge the books and move contraband with him around. They thought they'd have an easier time of it with him out playing pirate-hunter. They were quite wrong.
- Terra Cotta

- I have no love for Zhang and would put a bullet through his brain if given the chance, but I respect him as an adversary. Don't underestimate him—many have and paid the price. That naïveté he originally had may have lasted for about a month, but he caught on quickly. Why do you think that as soon as he got interdiction duty a lot of smuggler vessels and their contraband have found their way straight to Davy Jones' locker? And now that he's in charge, that's become SOP.
- Corsair Jane

Despite all the favoritism and corruption within the Maritime Authority, Zhang was (surprisingly) able to quickly climb the command ladder, and eventually he took the top spot. Since obtaining this position two years ago, Zhang has enacted several reform policies to weed out all the dirty officers in his command. He's had some reasonable success, but he knows that for every dirty officer he finds, there are several more to take their place. Every day is a constant battle for Zhang, but he still does what he does best: giving pirates and smugglers headaches.

- How in the seven hells did he manage to get the top spot? You would think that he would have ended up floating face up in Tolo first.
- Colton Croft

- Despite his squeaky-clean and untouchable image, Zhang knows how to fight dirty, and he knew where the right skeletons were buried. Instead of monetary gain, he used that information as leverage to strong-arm his way to the top. No one was happy, at first. But he actually had a positive effect on business by curtailing a lot of the heavy fighting going on. That is, until Long I Sao and Fei Yu started their little pirate war a few weeks ago. Now Zhang is scrambling, trying to get it under control before the bigwigs at Government House drop the hammer on him.
- Corsair Jane

CORPORATE

TAN JING

(MALE ELF)—WUXING COMPANY MAN

Tan Jing is pretty much what one would expect from a Wuxing company man. He's immaculately dressed and manicured, inaccessibly polite, attractive (if you go for the tall and exotic types), slightly unassuming, eager to help, and has a totally sterilized history. And of course this is all to disguise the fact that he could probably kill every damn motherfragger in the room.

Tan Jing has been a fixture in the Hong Kong shadows for decades now, acting as both operative and Johnson for the corporation. Yes that's right, decades. While most just chalk this up to his elvish heritage (even though he looks mostly human), others aren't quite convinced. Some say he's been the recipient of some cutting-edge cosmetic surgery, while others say that Tan is not the original Tan—instead, he's the latest in a long line of Wuxing company agents who have taken up the mantle of "Tan" over the years.

- He's called "Wuxing's Hans Brackhaus" here in Hong Kong. That should tell you something.
- The Dragon Reborn

- Like what? Did I miss something?
- Sunny Tzu

- Are you kidding me? How do the greenies keep getting on this board?
- The Dragon Reborn

Despite Tan's murky background, a few facts are known about him. The first is that his affiliation with Wuxing is an open secret. He makes no real effort to hide the fact he represents Wuxing's interests in Hong Kong; he even prints this on his e-cards.

- Why would he do something like that? Sounds stupid.
- Sunny Tzu

- Being known isn't always a bad thing, at least for people like Tan. Ever hear the expression "your reputation precedes you"? Because he's been around so long (depending on which rumor you buy into), everyone already knows who he is and who he represents. So why waste time and effort trying to hide it? I may be getting ahead of myself, but anyone who's dealt with Wuxing knows not to mess with

Tan unless you really like pain. And because of that rep, it's a lot easier to get cooperation from certain individuals when push comes to shove.

- The Neon Samurai

This, of course, gives Tan a lot of advantages when on the job. He never seems to want for a table, no matter how exclusive the restaurant. Most places he goes, people fall over themselves to make sure that he's been taken care of. It also means that certain government and civil organizations (read: Hong Kong Police) tend to not want to bother him.

Second, Tan is known to be an initiated adept who hasn't met a weapon he didn't like. While his favored weapons are a pair of *húdié shu□ng d□o* (a.k.a. "butterfly swords"), he's been known to pack a custom Colt Manhunter for when the lead starts flying. He backs that up with several throwing spikes and knives. He also likes to pack a lot of hidden weapons on his person at all times.

- Just a heads-up: Those nice gold cufflinks he always wears? One is a regular garrote, the other a monowire. You've been warned, and you're welcome.
- Monkey King

Third, Tan considers himself to be a cultured individual. He's been spotted at various art exhibitions and concerts and appears to have a deep appreciation for Western classical as well as traditional Chinese music. It's also worth noting that Tan is a big stickler when it comes to manners and etiquette, and he expects those he works with to act accordingly and not, as he's known to say, "like barbarians." Many potential runners have learned, usually the hard way, that in Tan's presence it's best to present yourself accordingly. And if you don't know how, or can't at least fake it, just keep your mouth shut.

- I can attest to this. A few months ago during a dinner/meet with Tan, the merc on our team couldn't keep her mouth shut while she was eating. Tan was noticeably irritated but tried to brush it off until out of the blue he flicked his chopstick down the merc's throat. Nothing life threatening, but she (and we) got the hint about proper manners.
- Guy Lo

And finally, Tan is *Wuxing's* Johnson. This means that if someone else from Wuxing is trying to hire you in Hong Kong, you'd better put a few extra eyes on your six, because something just isn't quite right.

TUEN FENFANG

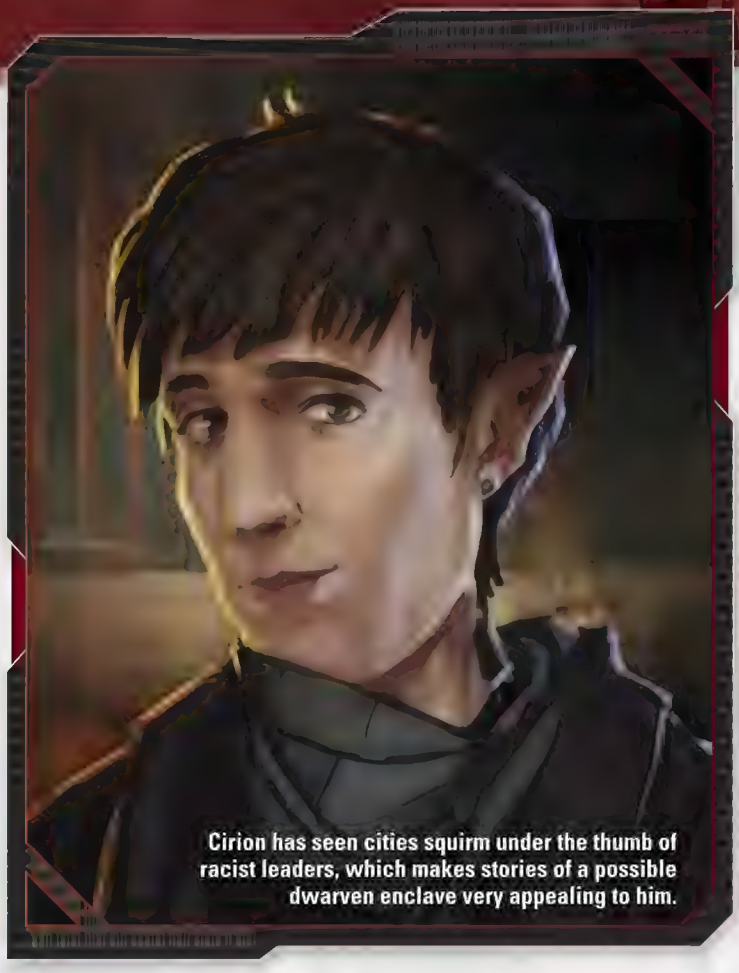
(DWARF FEMALE)—TECH ACE

Power is, of course, the ability to make other people conform to your will. It's also the freedom to be yourself without repercussions. When you're starting a job—any job, even shadowrunning—there are parts of your personality you hide or subvert, because you need to make a good impression, and we all know there are aspects of ourselves that don't do that. If you manage to get into a position where you have power, where you have something that someone else wants, you can do or say whatever you want as long as people still have a hope that they might get what they want from you. So if you're, say, a hotshot tech R&D specialist, and people know that if you work with them, there's a good chance you could come up with a design that would net them billions of nuyen, then they'll put up with a much broader set of eccentricities than they would from an entry-level noob. So if you were a fervent dwarven nationalist who spoke frequently about the importance of building an independent dwarven homeland, even if it meant carving out a piece of existing nations, people might let you speak at length about that as long as you kept the tech genius flowing. Where a low-level employee would be quickly muzzled. Or shot, if they were annoying enough.

Tuen Fenfang is a leader in cyberware. She has a vision of less-invasive cyberware, gear that works better with biological forms, with effectiveness similar to cyberware but allowing you to pack more of it into your frame. I can hear some of you street samurai drooling already. The simple fact of the matter is that Tuen has already made Shiawase billions of nuyen, and there's a good chance she will make tens if not hundreds of billions more. The corp lives under constant fear that she will be the target of an extraction, especially one that she is only all too eager to assist. So they are eager to keep her happy, even if that means letting her frequently have public platforms to discuss how the nations have an obligation to establish a homeland for dwarves, and she is willing to dedicate much of her personal fortune to making this happen.

Shiawase leadership were hoping Tuen's fascination would be a passing fad, but this does not seem to be the case. She has reached out to local Mothers of the Metahumans and Sons of Saurons chapters to find allies, and rumors say she is actively looking for places where she can purchase large tracts of land. Shiawase leaders don't know what will happen to her work if she actually buys land to build her dream, but if allowing her to look for land keeps her happy, and keeping her happy means she continues to develop profitable products for them, then for now they're willing to see where her dream will carry her.

- The same thing will happen to her that happens to anyone who is too open about really wanting something: She'll be targeted by con men. Yeah, you could try the whole fake-land-deed thing with her, but she's pretty savvy—that would be a tough one to slip by her. No, you need a more sophisticated game here, a megacorp-level con. The kind that isn't a con at all, it's just business. Any smart corp is currently assembling a large, lovely plot of land



Cirion has seen cities squirm under the thumb of racist leaders, which makes stories of a possible dwarven enclave very appealing to him.

and then buying up all the contractors and infrastructure companies in the surrounding area. Sell the land to Tuen, then have her use your new companies to develop the land. If you do it right and make sure you're the only game in town to the scale of construction she's going to want, you can gouge her like a melon. You'll make back what you paid for the companies, and anything else they earn will be gravy. And since time is important to keep up with Tuen's sense of urgency, waiting to buy land and companies won't do—get some shadowrunners to steal that drek for you. If Shiawase doesn't have a plan of this nature already in motion, I'd be sorely disappointed.

- Sam Tsung

- As should be clear, Tuen has a significant positive bias toward dwarves. Need an in with Shiawase? Find a dwarf who knows tech, then make sure Tuen hears about them. She's pretty active about mentoring tech skills in dwarves, so there's a good chance they'll at least be brought in to chat with Tuen about their future. If they play that conversation right, a job could be in the offing.
- Bai Bai

OTHER

"GRANDPA JING"

(HUMAN MALE)— SUPER RICH ECCENTRIC

There are a lot of unusual characters in the Hong Kong shadows, but near the top of the weird factor is a crazy old man known only as "Grandpa Jing."

Considered by most to be an urban legend, Grandpa Jing is rumored to be something of a cross between a genie and a fairy godfather, metaphorically speaking. He's said to appear to down-on-their-luck shadowrunners, those who are in their darkest hour, when despair or desperation has them two steps from ending it all. That's when he is said to appear and offer to help. Said help usually depends on the individual's specific needs. For some it's as simple as paying off a debt, for others it's more profound, like helping them overcome some kind long-enduring psychological trauma.

Whatever the need is, kindly Grandpa Jing is there to those who truly suffering.

- There's a lot of suffering out there. So what exactly is the criterion here? Is my suffering at losing 30K at the casino more profound than someone who lost their puppy? Work with me here, I got a bookie I need to pay off. Do I need to get my leg broken *first*?
- Guy Lo

- You're pathetic.
- Sam Tsung

Of course, Grandpa's aid doesn't come free. In exchange for his help, he asks for assistance in certain tasks. These tasks range in breadth and scope; some may be as simple as feeding a hungry stray animal or as complicated as getting into a high-risk security zone to retrieve something. Again, the task is based on the type of assistance Grandpa Jing provides. And if the task is completed exceptionally well, Grandpa Jing usually offers to continue his patronage in return for yet another task, with compensation being equal to the complexity and risk involved.

- Okay then, what happens if you screw up the job? Is Grandpa Jing gonna ask for some kind of collateral?
- Bai Bai

Once the agreement has been made to accept Grandpa Jing's aid, the recipient's life usually starts to take a turn for the better. Their health improves, more opportunities come their way, and in general their luck gets better. Those who have encountered Grandpa Jing often speak of being taken to an immaculate mansion on the outskirts of downtown where they are allowed to live until they get back on their feet.

Those who have reported encountering Grandpa Jing have occasionally tried to find the mansion again, but to no avail. While Grandpa Jing is considered a legend, there are many in Hong Kong who actively seek him out for his patronage.

- Okay, time for some chip-truth. Grandpa Jing isn't human; he's a free spirit. The real Grandpa Jing was Jing Han-Cao, a powerful geomancer who died of a heart attack after performing a massive *qi* cleansing of a corrupted ley line near Aberdeen. Jing's spirit companion took his former master's form, along with most aspects of his life. Now it lives by some odd code and does things for reasons I have yet to understand. I know it's difficult to explain, and even more so to turn down his help, but heed my warning and do *not* accept help from him. He considers accepting his aid a binding pact and may try to collect something you're not willing to give.
- Mojo Rising

DR. HANNA THOMPKINS

(FEMALE HUMAN)—MARINE BIOLOGIST/PART-TIME SMUGGLER

Dr. Thompkins is one of those odd individuals who find themselves involved in the shadows because it provides a unique solution to an equally unique problem.

A PhD in marine biology from Duke University, Dr. Thompkins first came to the China Sea in 2048 for her field studies. During her time there, she was convinced she had discovered a new species of Awakened cephalopod in the South China Sea. Her initial findings were enough to obtain a grant for another expedition, but when she failed to find any subsequent evidence, the university was unwilling to provide further funding. Unfortunately, she was also unable to raise the needed funds through private means. Undaunted, Dr. Thompkins returned to the South China Sea and Hong Kong. There she turned to a rather unorthodox method of raising money: She became a smuggler.

Using her deep-diving equipment and disguising the operation as yet another scientific expedition, Thompkins would engage in deep-water rendezvous and then smuggle the contraband du jour back to the mainland or wherever she needed to take it, all under the cover of *science*! Of course, her endeavors haven't gone unnoticed. More than once she's had to deal with the likes of pirates, other smugglers, and the occasional "safety inspection" courtesy of the Marine Authority.

- The good doctor also likes to hire runners to ride shotgun for her. The South China Sea is full of predators, and not just the fishy kind. Those who have diving or watercraft piloting experience tend to get better pay rates.
- Chengdao
- Well, she better either up their pay or hire some more. I just heard a rumor that Fei Yu has been eyeballing her very expensive and state-of-the-art scanning equipment. A nice ship like that would either fetch him a lot of money or be of great use in his little tiff with Long I Sao.
- Silk Roadie

- Not a good idea. Several smugglers and runners in the area are in tight with Doc Thompkins. The last thing he needs now is to alienate potential allies. Hell, if he made Doc a good enough offer, I'm sure she'd just help him.
- Corsair Jane

When not breaking a host of international laws, the good doctor spends all of her free time conducting field research on her modified yacht, the *Deepwater Vagabond*, looking for what she has dubbed *Architeuthis Megagiganteus Rex*, or simply the "King Kraken."

- What ... *bigger*? How the hell could something like that get bigger? And she wants to go after it? Has she been getting enough oxygen to her brain?
- SunnyTzu

According to reports published thus far, this new species of kraken is approximately ten percent bigger than the previously discovered species, and rather than having the traditional "arrow-like" shape to its fore-body, it appears to have several protrusions that make it seem to be wearing a crown. The purpose of this crown is yet to be determined, but Dr. Thompkins believes it to be some kind of sensory organ. Whatever may be down there, be it the King Kraken or something else, Dr. Thompkins is determined to find it.

CRAZY CHIN

(FEMALE DWARF)—CAB DRIVER AND TOUR GUIDE

Those who visit Hong Kong on (shadow) business are always advised to get one of the locals to show them around so they don't do or say anything stupid. If you need this service, you should know that no tour guide is more famous—or infamous—than Crazy Chin. A giant by dwarf standards, Chin is 1.4 meters of barely contained hyperactivity and energy stuffed into an burlap sack of daredevilry.

Before becoming a cab driver and tour guide, Chin was a rigger for an independent pirate band working near the Southern Coast. A natural rigger, she could outrun Marine Authority interceptors with ease, command multiple drones simultaneously, and still have enough attention span left to finish her latest Sudoku puzzle. Chin was good at her job, but sometimes that's not enough. Being a part of an independent crew, Chin's captain was often pressured to join up with one of the larger pirate

bands. For years they remained independent, but eventually self-styled "pirate queen" Long I Sao decided she wasn't going to take no for an answer any more. And when Chin's captain said no, Sao torpedoed their boat. Chin survived thanks to the ejection seat she installed in the boat only a week before.

- Chin's crew flat-out laughed at her for putting an aircraft ejection seat on the boat. Well, who's laughing now?
- Monkey King

Knowing she couldn't go back to the sea, Chin decided to give terra firma a try. Scrounging up enough money for a cheap, no-frills cab, she took to Hong Kong's streets and immediately made an impression ... several, in fact, mostly in the form of dents in various vehicle bumpers, doors, a couple of windows, and so on. But eventually Chin found her ground legs and was darting through traffic like a champ.

Along the way she started to make a lot of friends, which tends to happen when you keep your cab stocked with various assortments of delicious snacks (shots of booze) that you hand out free to all your passengers. The snacks and booze (mostly the booze) also helped calm their nerves after slicing through traffic at high speeds and missing other vehicles by a scant few centimeters. All this while talking casually about the last Hong Kong Cavalier combat biker game. This, combined with her ability to navigate the heaviest of traffic with ease, made Chin a favorite among Hong Kong's cabbies.

- Chin got the moniker "Crazy" a year ago when she was roaring through downtown at about 120 kph and turned a corner, almost blasting two lines of cars stopped for some minor construction. But instead of making a metal sandwich, she put her cab on two wheels and went right up the middle and through the construction zone. Her passenger puked as soon as he got out.
- Wing Chung

- Pro tip: If you ever need to get anywhere in Hong Kong quickly, call Chin. Just make sure you don't have a full stomach when she picks you up.
- Young and Fat

Being a cabbie, Chin was able to make contacts with people from all over the Free Enterprise Zone. These included everyday wageslaves, officials, the occasional criminal, and even a few shadowrunners (who for some reason don't have their own vehicle). She also learned just about every back street and location in Hong Kong. All this combines to make Chin an ideal contact and resource for those just getting into town. For a modest daily fee, Chin will be more than happy to play chaperone for the day.

Just be sure to buckle up.

- Out-of-towners aren't the only ones who've tapped Chin for her connections. I and several of my associates also hit her up on a regular basis for the latest gossip on the streets, because believe it or not people sometimes get blabby when in a cab. Also, snacks!
- HK Cavalier

BRADLEY MCTAGGART

(MALE HUMAN)– OWNER/MANAGER, DRUNKEN MONKEY

Just off the beach along Hong Kong's Southern Coast is a small and unassuming building that from the outside looks like just another ramshackle fishing shack. But in reality it's one of the biggest, hottest mercenary bars in the region. If you're looking for the latest news on all things military in the region, go to the Monkey. If you want some of the strongest booze and coldest beers in the area, go to the Monkey. Need some extra muscle for a job, you got it, go to the Monkey. Just keep a respectful tone and mind your manners. Mercs tend to be a gregarious bunch, as long as you play it right.

The Monkey's current owner/manager is Captain Bradley "Tag" McTaggart, former mercenary by way of the British SAS. He took over in 2052 after an involuntary tour of duty under the command of the Aztlan military, helping pacify rebel factions in the Yucatan. The entire affair left a bad taste in his mouth, and he left as soon as he could, taking an early separation and turning down several bonuses. Wanting nothing more than a place far away from Aztlan to kill as many memories of the Yucatan as possible through copious amounts of booze, he followed one of his squad mates to Hong Kong.

- Tag was one of the few good ones over there. Despite pressure from his Aztlan superiors, he resisted using the brutal tactics they favored. He hated what he was doing, but like many mercs at the time, Aztlan bought out his contract through a fine-print clause. Unless he wanted to be blacklisted, he had little choice but to do his job. For what it's worth, he did it with the least amount of force necessary whenever he could. I'm glad he made it out, especially after the solid he and his unit did for me and mine. Maybe someday I'll be able to pay him back.
- Shades

After six months of assaulting his liver, Tag woke up one morning ... afternoon ... early evening following a particularly nasty bender where he outdrank several orks and a troll to find that he was now the Drunken Monkey's newest owner/manager. Apparently, the former owner, a dwarf named Kang Lo, had taken a shining to the "Limey Bastard" before he did a ninja-vanish and decided to leave the bar to him, which was news to Tag who frankly despised the smelly halfer and thought the feeling was mutual.

- Tag made it out, but not completely. Aztlan really did a number on him. It was a dirty fight there and Tag's a decent guy, so do the math. Like a lot of mercs and soldiers, a part of him is still back there, and he re-lives it every night. That's why he was so eager to commit suicide by bottle when he first got here. At least now he has something to live for, and I think that was Kang's plan. But still, some nights ...
- Ching-Ching Pow

With nowhere else to go, Tag sobered up (mostly) and went to his new bar to take command. There was a short adjustment period where the staff challenged his authority, but soon Tag had things under control, and life at the Monkey continued on.

- "Adjustment period" is an understatement. Most of the staff, who happened to be the ones Tag drunk under the table (literally), had expected the Monkey to go to one of them, not some *gwailo*. They weren't happy and were quite vocal with their displeasure. But Tag isn't a pushover, and he won them over in traditional bar fashion, with punching and kicking and several flying glasses. After they bandaged each other up, replaced all the tables and half the bar stock, and fixed the north wall, things got back to what passes for normal.
- Changdao

Tag now runs the Monkey with more or less the efficiency one would expect of a former Special Forces operator and only consumes only about half(ish) the amount of liquor he did when he first arrived. Tag may be in his late forties, but he epitomizes the saying "beware the old man in the profession where men die young." But despite his constant complaining about being "stuck" at the Monkey, Tag really loves the place in all its scummy dive-bar glory. And even though fights break out frequently, it's still pretty peaceful by his standards.

J. MURDOCK

(HUMAN MALE)—BUSINESSMAN/ INFORMATION BROKER

Said to be "so British it hurts," J. Murdock is the owner/proprietor of Murdock Imports and Exports, the biggest independent transport hub in Hong Kong that's *not* under the control of a rated corporation. And when not dealing with the rigors of running his own business, J. Murdock has a little side venture as one of the premier information brokers in the Free Enterprise Zone.

And all this before tea time.

Stereotypical of a British businessman in Hong Kong, Murdock's family has longstanding ties to the region. His father was a freighter captain for Maersk back in the '20s and '30s and would often fly Murdock and his mother to Hong Kong for long weekends. And of course, he liked the region so much that he came back in the early '40s to start his own business.

- Murdock will never admit to it, but his father was a bit of a smuggler back in his day. So when he came back to Hong Kong in '41, he used a lot of his father's contacts to lay the foundation for his own network. If you do ask him about it, he'll say he "pulled himself up by his own bootstraps" using his "natural charm and wit." What an ego.
- Sifu Smith

- Yeah, but he's also got the connections and credit line to back it up.
- Wayne Chung

After arriving in Hong Kong, Murdock worked out a deal with the Board of Governors to lease out a dilapidated section of Tolo Harbor, rebuilding and turning it into his regional HQ. It's now one of the most modern and efficient cargo hubs in the harbor. This move by Murdock and the Board didn't sit well with either Wuxing or Maersk, and many thought it only a matter of time before someone swallowed Murdock up whole. But thanks to what Murdock calls a "gentleman's agreement," nothing happened.

- In case anyone is wondering, that "gentleman's agreement" was that Murdock wouldn't get into the shipping business, but instead maintain a transportation hub where both Maersk and Wuxing would get bulk-cargo premium rates and priority onloading/offloading. It also didn't hurt when certain "questionable" items quietly slipped through.
- Mo Coin

When he's not jetting around the world like some English playboy, checking in on his other business holdings in London, Lisbon, Morocco, and New York, Murdock can usually be found hobnobbing with the upper echelons of Hong Kong high society. He's especially known for his many gathering and parties, usually on one of his many yachts. His Chinese New Year and Christmas parties are considered to be the most prestigious events of the year, and they draw some of the most powerful and influential people in the Free Enterprise Zone.

He's also known to hire some of the best snoops and investigators in the region and will pay top yen for viable paydata of any kind. Murdock knows that should someone make a play against him, he doesn't have the muscle to take on a heavy hitter. So instead he tries to stay one (or five) steps ahead of the competition.

- If you want to get some choice snooping in, the New Year's and Christmas parties are goldmines of paydata—*if* you can get past Murdock's security. The guy isn't shy with

the nuyen and will often hire extra security consultants to run interference. Hell, even if you do get caught, a lot of times, if you share the data, he'll let you go.

- Silk Roadie

- And yet another example of how he gets his information. That, and his places have more bugs (the electronic kind) in them than Chicago in summer.
- Just Johnny

While he surrounds himself with trappings befitting English royalty, Murdock is surprisingly approachable and quite down to Earth. He considers himself a rather "cheeky fellow." But don't think for a moment he isn't gleaning every bit of information he can from you. He may be a "decent chap," but he didn't survive this long by being soft. When it comes to business, he will do whatever it takes to survive.

LEE JONES

(HUMAN MALE)— PROFESSIONAL NEGOTIATOR

Simply put, Lee Jones is a negotiator, a master deal-maker who's so good and well-respected in Hong Kong that negotiating is all he does.

A suave and debonair human male with trid-star charisma, Jones looks like he should be starring in spy-sims or devouring the souls of the opposition in a corporate board room instead of navigating Hong Kong's back alleys. His client list is as diverse as Hong Kong's black market. Triad Incense Masters, corporate Johnsons, pirate captains, and shadowrunners have hired him. But Jones' services don't come cheap; it costs at least five thousand just for a consultation, and that's if he likes you. Jones is a pure professional and will only work with/for those of like mind.

- This makes Lee seem like a cold-hearted snob, except he's not. He just doesn't put up with any bulldrek from people who should know better.
- Guy Lo

- He'll help out a chum-of-a-chum from time to time in exchange for a favor (or five, depending). Usually, the favors involve something like watching his six during a meet, doing legwork, or a hard extraction on those occasions when things go sideways.
- HK Cavalier

His immaculate suits and demeanor immediately tell you that Jones isn't someone to mess with. No one's certain if he's Awakened and extremely good at masking, or if he's got some uber-experimental cyber that can't be detected. But don't think he can't handle himself. He ran the shadows for almost a decade and knows how to throw a punch and shoot a gun.

Jones (not his real name, duh) is a Hong Kong native, but he's still got a little bit of *gwailo* in him, as evinced by his natural red hair (with trademark black streak in front). He got his hoop kicked a lot because of it growing up, but when he reached his late teens, Jones started running the Hong Kong shadows. While decent in a fight, Jones' primary job was a face and legwork man. Using a combination of charm and perception, he conned his way into several places he was never meant to see.

But his true calling came about three years ago. Jones and his team were hired to retrieve a kidnapped "princess" on the behalf of none other than Kindly Cheng. Unfortunately for Jones, the team refused to listen to him and went with a frontal assault that failed spectacularly and killed everyone except Jones. No one's sure what happened after that, but Jones went back to Cheng—who normally would have had him skinned alive—and walked out with 50K and Cheng's gratitude. Whatever happened regarding that run, Jones isn't telling.

- Okay, I will. Ya see, "Princess" was the niece of William Wright, a VP at Maersk and a member of Cheng's circle of contacts. Seems Princess decided to go all Helen of Troy and leave her loving uncle (and legal guardian) to shack up with Kang Sun, a low-level Triad goon who was having problems bringing in money like a good little gangster should. Well, after Jones' team blows it and he's staring down the barrel of a Triad gun, he convinces Sun that Cheng will only send more until she gets what she wants, which could lead to a lot of unpleasantness. Long story short, Jones convinces Wright to have Princess offer up her Maersk shares to uncle (which is what he really wanted) in exchange for investing ten percent of that stock cash value to Sun's new venture. That money would be laundered by Cheng for a modest commission and an additional five percent of the business' profits for five years. Now I don't know the exact math, but it was enough to satisfy all parties and save Jones' hoop.
- SunnyTzu

- Huh, so that's how Wright got his seat on the board of directors. But Sunny, better watch out—if Cheng finds out you told, she isn't going to be happy.
- Mo Coin

- Whatever. How's she gonna know?
- SunnyTzu

- She may not, but I do. Plan on having a talk with me and Kang *real* soon, Sunny.
- Lee Jones

After that, Jones' rep skyrocketed, and more and more people were coming to him to help them negotiate various problems they were having. A new career was born.

THE BEST OF HONG KONG

- Want to know more about the action happening on the ground of Hong Kong? Want to know who's doing it? Check out this transcript. It won't tell you everything you need to know about running in this sprawl, because nothing ever could. It'll give you some hints, though, about the interests that are out there, who is doing what, how plots are intertwined, and how nothing is ever simple.
- Fastjack

RECORDED JOURNAL

JANUARY 2055. SAMUEL THORNTON, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR. THAT'D BE ME. Serried balconies rise in a steep cliff to a dead sky, no discernible order to their construction.

Back alleys flooded by a loam of trash.

The permanent not-rain on my duster, the product of thousands of DIY tubes running the alleys of Walled City like sclerotic veins packed with waste. Drip, drip, drip.

I haven't been here in a year. Now, I stand in the courtyard made by the crush of eleven buildings pushed as close together as cigarettes in a pack. A screaming comes down the well, down the heart of Walled City. A plane, its silhouette against the smog-ridden day. For a moment, I am in darkness, and I am afraid.

This is Hak Nam, Kowloon Walled City, a place that died and was resurrected by those who live between the walls of the world.

Unlicensed dentists, mahjong parlors, street docs, pimps and whores, razorboys and girls living in spaces the size of a bathroom back home in Seattle. Space is at a premium in this lawless zone.

This isn't Hong Kong. Strictly speaking, Walled City isn't anyplace. It's one of the last gaps in the grid of world, a place largely free of organized control. This is the final blank spot on the map of the Earth, and here I am, a *gwailo*, a Vasco De Gama of the underworld exploring places most won't go.

When I say it's a blank on the map, I mean it's blank to those not in the know. Official maps of Walled City don't exist. This place is like the Matrix was before most people realized there was a Matrix—free but difficult to navigate. If you want to get lost, if you have the a megacorp looking to geek your ass, Kowloon Walled City is about as far away from anything as you can get and still be in a "civilized" place.

Place, ha. Like I said, the stories upon stories of ramshackle buildings look more grown than built, at if it were a human anthill composed of the detritus of a century's memories. Drek, I saw a cathode-ray tube TV in a shop window just now. It sat next to a Victorian doll, her fragile lace dress gone to yellow, like it'd crumble if you touched her. The whole place looks like that, fragile but somehow persisting through all the harshness of the world. Walled City survived both the Brits and the Chinese. It will survive the Sixth World. It will survive us all.

I'm looking for a bar called The 888, named for luck according to the mystery girl who called me and said I'd best come by unless I wanted my personal business out for all to see. She had pictures. Names and dates. You understand how it is.

A set of uneven, chipboard stairs lead down into a pit of smoke and sweat and sin, all backed by the alcohol necessary to forget the former. If you're looking to burn your SIN, burn the trail of your life from the data flows of the world, this is a good place to come. No law in Walled City, no contracts with Lone Star or the Knights. Triads are as close to a ruling body as you get. I may need that burn after this, assuming they don't geek me here. I hope someone finds this if I am geeked. Mara, dear ex-wife and righteous bitch—if you're hearing this, I'm dead. No more alimony. That's what you get for getting custody of my dog. *My dog*.

I shoulder my way into the bar, really no more than five stools, like those micro-pubs on Golden Street in Tokyo. I miss Tokyo, but that's another story. I have a habit of wearing out my welcome wherever I go. Seven years in Hong Kong is a personal record, as it happens.

Neon signs advertising the names of beers that haven't been brewed in two decades light the brutalist-like features of the ork bartender. His cyberarm ticks as servos older than me whine against age.

I sit down and see myself in the mirror though a layer of condensation. You've looked better, Sam. You've looked better.

A Babel-speak of Chinese from my right. A girl, beautiful in a non-modified way, local flavor. Muscles barely hidden under some fabric that looks like it was cut out of shadow itself. I hold up one finger and slot the translator soft. Mandarin is absorbed, verbs and nouns and sentence structure settling comfortably into my own neural net. She points behind me. "You have an admirer," she says.

"Seat's saved, fragger." This from where the girl pointed. I turn and see a mean ass elf, opposite of the graceful types you see working the shadows. Ass-ugly too. Makes the bartender look like Maria Mercurial.

"Don't see a name on it."

He stands up, legs rubbery from the booze. "You don't belong here, *gwailo*."

"No. No I don't, but we wind up in the places we deserve to be, not where we'd choose." Too early for existential points of view?

He telegraphs a clumsy swing, and I uppercut him. The back of his head hits the bar right before he slides unconscious to the floor. I note the distinctive sound of weapons being unholstered behind me. I turn, real slow. Four guns pointed at me, and everything in this bar is point blank range.

"Easy, chummers." I say it with a smile. That smile has saved my life. To be fair, it has endangered it just as frequently.

The girl on the stool next to me stands up. She's two meters if she's a centimeter. "He's with me," she says to the crowd. They put their guns away. They don't want to frag with her. She has mucho face here. That's honor to you *gwailos*.

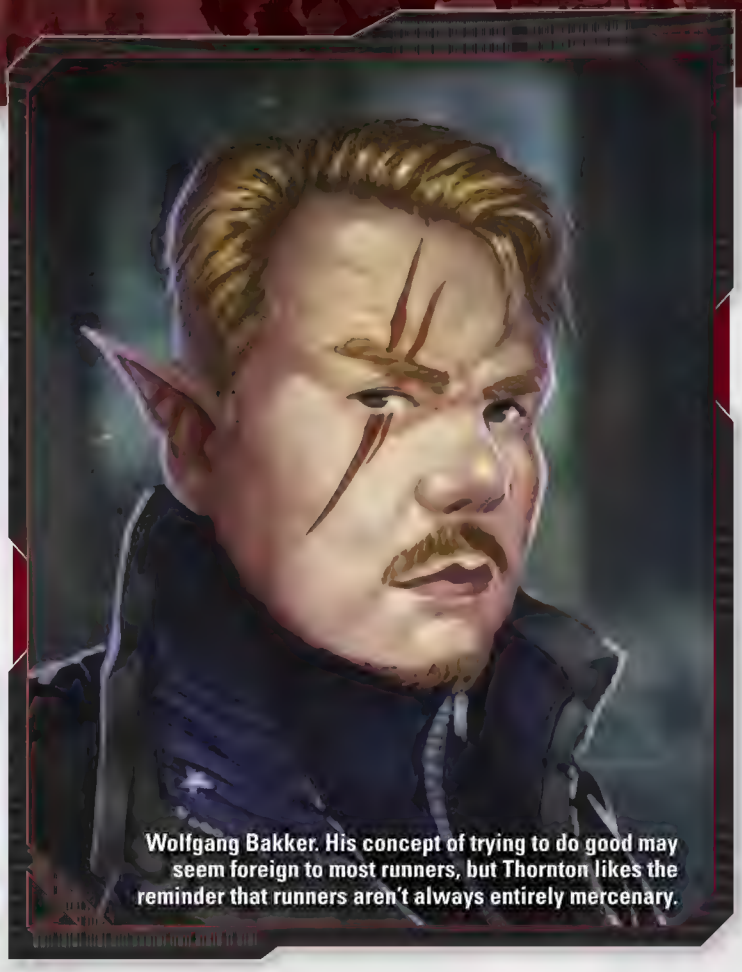
"You the mysterious voice on my comm?" She smiles, but it's more feral than friendly.

"Fan," she says. The slotted soft gives its literal meaning—lethal. Great name for a razorgirl. "You always drek on someone's face as a hello?" Her English accented with the fading remnants of the British Empire. Most locals have that, if they bother to learn English rather than use a soft. Brits were in charge for a whole century here.

I size her up, liking what I see.

"Don't even think about looking at me that way again," Fan says, not mad about it, but the subtext comes with the slight pop of her razor claws for demonstration.

"Me? Wouldn't think of it."



Wolfgang Bakker. His concept of trying to do good may seem foreign to most runners, but Thornton likes the reminder that runners aren't always entirely mercenary.

"UCASianas, all the same, loud and overconfident." The chrome tip of her boot rolls the elf on his back. "Tak here will be wanting to regain that face, Mr. Thornton. He'll want to geek you."

"I'll put him on the list." The bartender delivers Suntory whiskey to my new friend Fan. I hold up two fingers. He brings the second. Strong, warm, breakfast of champions.

"Have your whiskey, then we're out of here," Fan says, downing her drink in one go.

"You going to tell me what this is about?"

"Patience is a bitter plant, but has sweet fruit."

"That a proverb?"

Without looking at me she says, "That's a shut the frag up, Sam."

I think I like her.

Labyrinthine corridors, filled with displaced objects—the rusted chassis of a motorcycle, a propaganda poster from an anti-corporate movement warped and bubbled by moisture, a vintage Polaroid, the dead eyes of the previous century looking back—all and any of this registers in my periphery as I follow Fan. Her sure stride takes us back through the hollow heart of Hak Nam. This is where I saw the jet, where children now play with a soccer ball and adults play mahjong at iron tables green with verdigris. Then, it's into another building, the crazyquilt pattern of endless balconies looking down at the lifeless concrete rectangle that forms what Fan says is "the park" behind us. Needs a gardener, maybe a demolitions expert.

More stairs and the constant drizzle from jerry-rigged plumbing make me wonder if there isn't more than water dripping onto my duster. We stop outside a body chop shop. Not a fix-you-up street doc, but someone specializing in body modification as art. The waiting room offers a view of the surgery through scratched glass. There, robot arms are manipulated by the doctor working on implanting what look like chrome shark teeth in a sedated human. The doc waves his hands in haptics and, like magic, the robot arms do their work.

People loiter in the mish-mash chairs—not one matches another, like a furniture sale at a barrens charity. One's an old man wearing honest-to-god spectacles and reading an actual newspaper. Paper itself looks a hundred years old, and the date confirms it. He's like a ghost of post-war China. It takes me a moment to realize he's asleep.

"Sit," Fan commands.

I do so, in a chair whose stuffing is kept at bay by an X of silver duct tape. I like bossy women, what can I say?

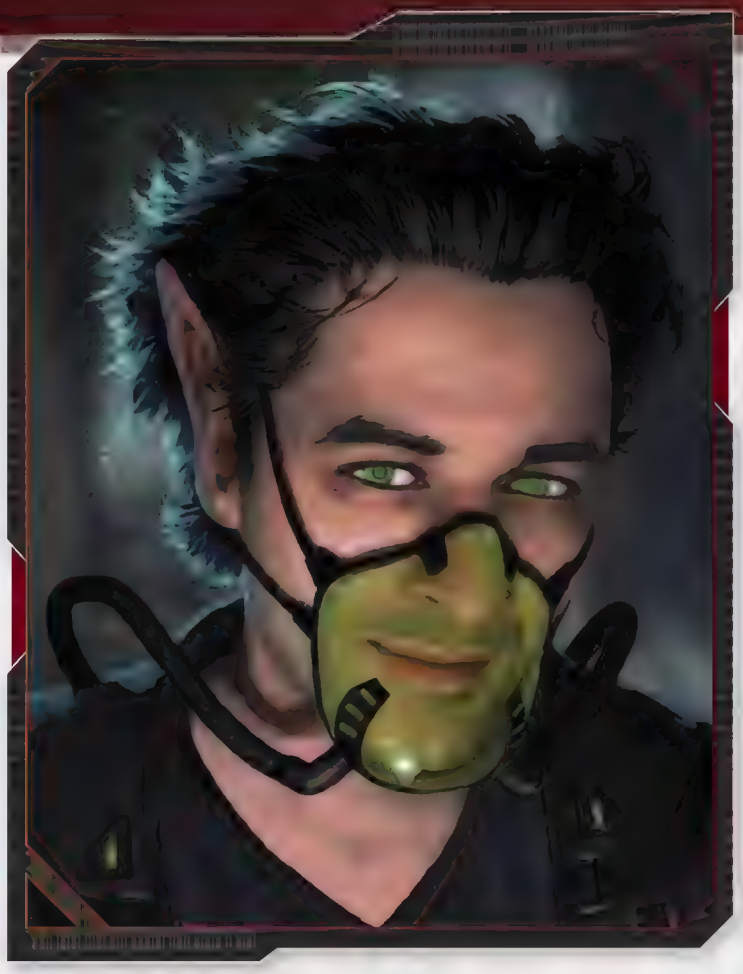
In addition to the comatose old man, there are three other people sitting in the waiting room. First is a skinny elf, and I mean skinny even *for* an elf. He's got on jeans and some nerd shirt, and his foot taps like he's trying to Morse code the floor. He's high. He's a decker. I read people. It's my job.

The next is an ork in a cowboy hat and drek-kicker boots. He's chromed out, probably has augmented muscle to boot. A jack in his head looks fresh. He's street samurai; a blind dog could figure that out. Maybe a dead one too.

Finally, an Asian woman in this season's must-have light body armor, Prada by way of ARES Arms. Not sure on her job description, but I say she's a mage of some flavor.

"You aren't the only one who has joined us, Sam," Fan says. "I'll let them know you're here."

Fan walks to a door in back, knocks once. The door opens and she goes inside. She will be in there for a while, I'm guessing, giving me time to get to know others my fellow victims in blackmail. No doubt that's intentional, but why? I scope the runners around me. I don't much like runners. My business may not always be honest, but it's a closer facsimile than the drek they swim in.



The group of us plays eye tag for a bit, silently sizing each other up. Finally, the elf speaks, "The frag are we doing here? This is bulldrek. We should leave." No one does. That damn foot, tapping out a meaningless code again. He's on speed. That could get problematic if we need to reason with our would-be blackmailers. Not that we have any leverage.

The ork speaks, Texas twang pulling on his words like an old ache. "I reckon the elf has a good question, though. What *are* we doing here?"

I tap out a cigarette and light it. Yeah, yeah, I quit two weeks ago. "Seems to me we're all here because Ms. Fan's employer has something on us."

Everyone's eyes find the floor. Shame will do that. What sins brought everyone here? I only know my own.

"What do they have on you—Samuel, was it?" This from the Asian woman, her cheekbones hard as chisels.

"Sam. And what do they have on me? I'm guessing the same they have on you ...." I pause for effect. "Everything."

"What do you do?"

"Private investigations. No case too small, no sin too great." She nods.

The elf laughs. "Seattle. I know you. You're that private dick."

"Don't know you, flower."

"Yeah, yeah you do. Only you don't know it. Dug up info for your ex-wife during the divorce. Man, you got hosed on that settlement."

"We all get our turn. You maybe want to stop tapping that foot before I tap your face, speedfreak?"

He does. "Easy, chummer. We're all in the same business here." I don't bother to refute that. Hell, I almost don't lie about it to myself anymore.

"What's your story, private eye?" The elf leans in close, engulfing me in a cloud of alcohol.

"You first." The elf's face pulls away from mine as he reclines as best he can in these plastic chairs. His leathers creak like an old house as he does. He crosses his arms. Sure, draw your line in the sand over that.

"Frag it," the ork says. "We either sit here and wait, or we try an suss out what they want us for." He's smart. I stub out my smoke.

"My name is Flo Rider," the elf says, "and it all started with a girl with a gun."

Don't I know it.

FLO RIDER'S STORY

"How it was, I needed nuyen. The usual, yeah? So, I'm in Yao Sim Mong market. Yeah, I was that desperate. Maybe a bit drunk, too, which is why it took me a moment to realize this human girl lifted my wallet. I mean, it was empty, but it's the principal of the thing, right? This was yesterday. No, earlier today.

"So I follow her, want to corner her, but she spies me—like I said, I was drunk, all right? She bolts into the mass of buyers. A crowd that thick is like parting the Red Sea, right? And me, I'm not muscle, ya know? I ain't Moses, either. I surf data. Fortunately, I'm wiry and quick, so I duck and weave through the crowd. It was wiz. I slalomed the hell out of that place. Got metatypes shouting at me in half a dozen languages as I trip them up, but I don't care, I'm going to get this girl, am I right?

"Through the market now, chasing her, warez and fish and whatever else flashing like a deck of cards in my peripheral view. How fast I was going? The girl, she's fast but not elf fast. Ha! So she ditches the market and heads into the crush of buildings. You know how it is there, almost as bad as Walled City here. Well, no, that's not true. Ha!

"So I keep on keeping on after her and we jigsaw through these maze streets and alleys until I have her cornered. She's searching the walls around her for anything climbable, but it ain't there, ya know? She backs up against the wall at the end of the alley, pulls out a Saturday Night Special on me. Holds it two handed to steady the shakes. I see now she's maybe fifteen. A kid, ya know? I tell her, give me back my wallet and we're square. I know what it is to be hungry. Karma goes around, right?

"Then she's staring at my chest. Not looking me in the eyes anymore, staring right at my chest and I look down. This red dot is jumping around my leather jacket. It's gotta be a laser sight, right? Now I'm like, frag this. Keep the wallet, but this woman's voice behind me says, 'You can go, Bai.' The voice says it to the girl who lowers the zip gun and edges along the alley wall to move past me. At this point I turn around and see this woman in a nylon bomber jacket, hot as all—Fan."

"Wait a minute," says the ork. "Fan found you too?"

Flo Rider cuts him off. "Yeah, she did. Let me finish my story, right?"

Rider readjusts his position in the chair, more for cool than comfort. I get that off him, that he wants to seem aloof but desperately needs to be liked.

"Where was I? Oh, right, Fan at the end of the alley. Well, she has a gun too, right? H&K MP-5TX with the integral laser site still on me, but she's casual with it, like using a laser pointer in some corp meeting. 'And here's the graph no one gives a frag about.' Like that. Cute though, but I like my own metatype. I'm not a racist. I mean, I'd get it on with a dwarf or human, sure, if she were cute."

"Get back to the fragging story," the ork says. He's interested. I'm interested, too, because these three runners don't know each other, but Fan, she's a common denominator. We're meant to chat like this. No doubt, we're being watched.

"You orks, no patience. Drek for cuisine, too." The ork laughs at this, knowing he could snap Rider like the hollow bone of a bird.

"Fan uses my name, my real name, and says, 'We needed to make sure you were sober enough?' I'm all, 'Sober enough for what?'"

"She tells me she needed to know if I was sober enough to cut code today. The little cutpurse, she was bait. The whole thing was some damn interview or some drek. I'm pissed now, but the drink is leaning on me hard and, like I said, I need the nuyen, right? The MP-5 disappears into her coat which is, like, made of black ink, one of them memetic deals. Real flash. She says to come with her; someone needs to talk to me. I figure she could've geeked me outright then and there, and no one is mad enough at me to torture me, and she is cute, so I go with her. Might lead to a payday, right?

"Ten minutes later, we're in this Rolls Royce, and she's telling me how Hong Kong has more Rolls Royces than anywhere in the world. Like she's all of sudden miss tour guide, right? We drive through the edges of Kowloon till we come to a

building dressed up like a neon wedding cake. I don't even have my Mandarin soft in, but the holos toggle to English. Taxidermy was one of the signs, but we didn't go there. We went to a tailor. This is downtown, did I say that? I don't know if I said that.

"The tailor's place is just this little store that looks like it used to be a dry cleaners. This Asian dwarf comes out—not one I'd get it on with, mind you—and he's got a yellow measuring tape around his neck. Suddenly, Fan's demeanor shifts from being the boss lady to treating the dwarf like the boss. What kind a deal is this, run by a dwarf tailor, am I right?

"So, he says his name is Lao. Tells me how he just got a perfect bolt of silk the color of my eyes and he'd like to cut for me, which I think he means he's going to go at me with a knife, but it turns out it's some lingo tailors use. Of all the tailors in all of Hong Kong making knock-off Prada, he had to be mine, right? Never mind, it's an old movie reference, 2D. Ain't any of you got culture?"

"Casablanca," I tell him.

"Wrong! Frag it, of course, you don't have culture. Fan and Lao have a conversation in Mandarin, pretty brief. She leaves us alone but stands right outside the door in the hall. Lao offers me a seat. He sits after me.

"Calls me by my real name too. I haven't told anyone my real name since, like, forever, right? I know how to cover my trail, so who are they people? He knows all about me. Starts listing runs I pulled like he's reading my damn resume. Then he finishes, my own career looking like not-so-much the way he's summed it up. He says I'm good. I can feel code in my blood, in my retinas. Says some drek about how the code finds me. It's qi power. It's not, but I don't think I feel like an argument, right?

"I'm scared at this point. I'm elf enough to admit it. I'm good, but I know when someone holds are the cards. This poker game we play, and it usually ends in aces and eights, am I right? Anyway, I got nothing else to do, so I ask him what he wants me to do. Simple, he says. He wants me to hack into Wuxing, grab a file in transit. Simple my pale elven ass.

"The old dwarf, though, he's got a wad of nuyen the size of one of those old encyclopedias, so I'm in. Gives me another address and says he'd have his driver take me there to jack in. Well, I look at the address—he wrote in calligraphy that'd make one of the old-time samurai jealous—these precise strokes of ink, and all of it pointing here, right here to Walled City. At the bottom of the paper, he points to a password, says it allows the file to recognize me as the correct recipient of the data.

"Now, I haven't been here before, you know? I mean, the people here have their own things going on, and I respect that. I don't need to meddle. No law out here, it's an autonomous zone. We all know about Walled City. It's like the, what's it called, id? Yeah, like the id of Hong Kong. A Free Enterprise Zone inside a Free Enterprise Zone. Like those Russian dolls, am I right?

"Now, last I heard on the streets, the Green Gang triad were trying to run Hak Nam but, like I said, I ain't been in here before. The upside to jacking from here is here doesn't exactly exist in the Matrix like other places do. I mean, it does, but different. Right away I can see that this job was planned well ahead of my participation. And, really, I have no idea why they picked me for it. I'm good, but I'm half in the bag at this point. I should've seen it coming but, you know, beer goggles. Ha!

"Anyway, I go to this address and it's a brothel, right? I mean, not done up fancy with pink lips and dongs, but just most of a floor of one of these buildings I can't keep count of. Madame herself is expecting me, hurries me off to one of boudoirs, know what I'm saying? But there's no time for play, no girls in here. She shows me the jack, and I sit down on the bed, pull my deck out of Kevlar bag, and jack.

"I love it, jacking in, how the whole vast flow of human data cuts into you like razors holding residue speed. You know that moment? Well, you all don't, but that moment when you first jack in, and it's like all your molecules are spread all over the cosmos and drek? Best high ever. Only lasts a picosecond, though, and then you're back in the Matirx, but that's like a whole other cosmos, ya know?

"There I am, staring up at an approximation of Walled City itself but made of crystalline panes, like a stained glass window. It looks like a fairy dream, net side, not the hunk of drek you see in the real world. Thing is, you can't normally see it in the Matrix. I've tried. Believe me. So, being inside, somehow, lets me see what's otherwise a void in the net. That's hot. That's not something a decker sees everyday, right?

"There I am, outside the candy colored castle that is Walled City's presentation in the Matrix, and I can't even see my link. These Walled City deckers are flash, omaes. My deck tells me I'm posting from Helsinki first. I trace the route from Finland, to Macau, to Z-O, and all over to hell and back, and I still never get to the source in Walled City. About then, I'm feeling pretty confident. Later on, with the liquor bravado gone, I realize this was not such a good idea. But, hey, I'm impulsive, right?

"Wuxing presents as The Great Wall of Data, no drek. You've all seen it from afar, but I was up close and personal. It crawls with dragons and Chinese characters, all chasing each other like some kind of

child's game of tag only they never stop moving. Made my stomach nearly heave. I sleazed up to it nice and slow like asking out the prettiest girl in school. 'Hey, babe, I totally respect you.' I mask myself and join with the Wall. Fingers first, data electrifying everything from the tips of those fingers to my scalp. I can picture my hair rising in the meat. It was slick, how I did it. No, I'm not telling you all my tricks. I made myself look like the receiver the file was being sent to. Eh, frag it. You wouldn't understand any more anyway.

"All you need to know is I got in on the sly. Let me tell you this, though, they organize their data like an abacus as big as the ones god himself would use. Now that's something to see. So, I move the beads, looking like an innocent defragging program. I wait for the file. I use the password Lao gave me and grab it before the real program does. Then, I slip out of the Wall, and I'm good.

"I drop back into the meat—the hangover starting to lean in harder now as the buzz retreats to more friendly lines. Just me and the meat and the data in my deck. Me, sitting in a brothel on a bed shaped like a heart. And the data is so hot, boys, so very hot."

The human mage gives Flo Rider a dose of stink-eye when he uses the term "boys."

"Rider, you are full of drek. Your inebriated self probably hacked a college system and conjured the rest from the ylem of the universe."

"Oh, yeah, Penny—what is it, Further? What do you know about it?"

Her eyes narrow like lasers might shoot out of them. "Farthing. Penny Farthing. It's not something you would understand."

Me, I'm already trying connect the dots. "So, what happened after you got back here?" I ask him.

"I was getting to that, chummer. Give a man a little space to tell a tale, why don't you?"

"Get back to it then," the ork scowling, brow furrowed as if processing something, and that's when my instinct starts to get that bad feeling. If you've read this far, you're the sort of person that knows that feeling, knows what I'm talking about. Bad juju they used to call it in the old 2D movies. Granted, I knew this was all dodgy to begin with, but something is buzzing in my skull, before I can grab it, though, Flo Rider launches right back in.

"Yeah, so, I'm in the brothel. Don't think it's in this building, but this place might as well be dungeon in *Spells & Spelunkers*, right? I go home, and a boy wearing a baseball cap delivers the other half of my money. This kid was carrying a fat stack of nuyen. Anyone could have rolled him, but he has the cap, and the cap's a sign, right? It's a sign not to mess with the kid cause he's got Triad protection. I take my money, hide it, and decide to get myself some satay. Chungking Express, two floors down from my room. Best in the city, no drek."

Of course the Triads would come into it, but this blackmail business isn't their style. Who is this Fan and who told us to bring her here, the dwarf tailor?

"Hey, you listening, man?" Flo Rider asks me.

"Riveted. You're a marvel of storytelling. Really, do go on." The ork and mage laugh. Rider looks hurt but continues.

"Sitting there, maybe twenty minutes later, the satay in my belly, me drinking Mao's Little Red Beer, all is wiz. Hell, even the hangover is easing off. I'm on a karmic high, right? Not so much.

"I been in the game long enough to spot a pro trying very hard to look normal. The ones who don't, the ones who go all mall ninja, those aren't the ones you have to fear. It's the ones trying to blend in that you have to worry about. There were two of them.

"I'm moving as fast as I can before the first geek-man levels his TMP at me. Bullets stitch this fat kid behind me. They flat-out geeked him like collateral damage and do not care. They're heavy, ya know? Who does that?

"I'm wishing I went in for at least some base-grade wired reflexes right then, as the other geeker points his finger at me, zapping one of the food court chairs to arcane dust. At this point, it's just dumb luck I'm even alive. I guess maybe a bit of that karma high was still left. The hangover, though, she left but good. Ha!

"Anyway, I'm not a razorguy. This isn't my field, but it is my fight. I make straight for the escalator, but they're pros. They have a third man—hey, wasn't that a movie too?—covering that exit. Still too slow, Rider, I tell myself as the third geeker pulls out two knives and goes hardcore adept on me. That's it, boys—sorry, Penny, boys and girls—I'm done. Geeked. A dead link in the 'trix.

"And that's when that fabulous, sexy woman Fan shows up. That's when she shoots the adept right through the heart. Big arterial spray like a rooster tail behind a speedboat, only very, very red. She grabs my hand quicker than I can see, and we're sliding down the escalator like it's an amusement park ride. We hit the tarmac below, her dragging me toward what I keep screaming is a dead end. I mean, I live here right, I know how to get out Chunking Mansions.

Well, she seems to have known about a door I never saw, and before you can say boo we're out into that directionless gray light you get on cloudy days. Back into that Rolls I rode in before. Mr. Lao is in the front seat, but I don't see him until he speaks, because he's so short. He's got the car rigged so the pedals come to his feet. I wonder what that cost?"

"Stick to the facts, Rider," I tell him. Think I saw that on a black-and-white TV show.

"That's it, Sam." Flo Rider stretches the way cats do upon waking. "That's how I wound up here, boys and—I mean, folks."

"Did the dwarf come in with you?"

"You sound like a cop, Sam."

"Did he?"

"No."

"That's the first time you met Fan? Today, I mean?"

"Yeah, first time I ever saw her. You don't forget a girl like that." He's right there. Even an elf out of his head on wiz and speed would remember Fan.

The ork's brow configures itself into a deeper knot. Penny takes out a fetish coin and dances it across her knuckles. We all look at each other. Suspicious.

The coin rides across her knuckles and back. "It seems we have not been brought together by karma alone. No, some larger purpose brings us here. But for what? For whom? *Qi* pulls us together. The Tao at work." Tell us something we don't know, sweetheart.

The ork grunts. Flo Rider asks Penny, "You always talk like you have a credstick wedged up your ass?"

Penny raises one eyebrow just so, the Arc de Triomphe brought out of her snobbery bin. "You mean in compete and cogent sentences, Rider?"

He smiles. "Yeah, like that. Too good for street-speak?"

"Too good for your version, Mr. Rider."

"Hey, Dragon Lady, you got hosed like the rest of us or you wouldn't be here."

Her face momentarily registers the hit. "Touché, Mr. Rider."

"Speaking of reasons, Ms. Farthing, how is it you wound up here? Amongst the hoi polloi, that is." She smiles. Two-bit vocabulary is something I savor for rare occasions and rarer ladies.

"I don't give my story to strangers, Mister....?"

"Thornton."

PENNY'S STORY

"Mr. Thornton, I've been in Hong Kong most of my life. My grandfather attended the handing-over ceremonies in '97. It was a proud moment I heard throughout my childhood. My father worked for one of the oldest London banking firms here in Hong Kong before things crashed. As a Chinese man, the British thought less of him, rather like the dreadful attitude some have toward metahumans.

"My father held more wisdom in his palm than all the gwailo bankers combined. He invested well and supported the independence movement ideals that reified in 2015.

Lord Maloysius Shadowstone is one of those runners flamboyant enough that Penny Farthing likes teaming with him, since it makes her eccentricities seem much less significant.

"We don't need you fragging biography, Penny," the ork says.

"Rei-what?" asks Flo Rider.

Penny Farthing sighs, less at the duo than at the state of education in general.

"You always like this, Penny Further?"

"Farthing." Ice on the last syllable.

"Yeah, that too." Rider smiles without showing teeth. His lips are so thin they all but disappear.

"Look, Penny," I say. "We'd all love to sit around, have tea, and share each other's pedigrees from Burke's Peerage, but we all wound up here, on the same day. Someone wants something from us. I'd like to know as much about the situation before Fan returns with that someone."

"Very well. I shall move forward in the narrative."

"Finally," Rider says, soliciting another dose of stink-eye.

"As I was saying, various circumstances led me to an arcane life. I see you lot have no desire to hear the recounting of that, so I shall rejoin my experience at the incident which sent me on the path leading to this un-space, this place without place.

Of course, the Tao is everything so, in a sense, we have always been on this path.

"I am not as unfamiliar with Walled City as you are, Mr. Rider. I suspect our nameless ork friend also knows something of this interzone. I believe my story, while it pales next to your tale of heroics, may shed some light on your own misadventure, perhaps on all of ours."

"Rider," she says, "what was the password?"

"Why?"

"I reckon you ought to tell her, Rider." The ork tips his hat toward Penny. How gallant.

Flo Rider rattles out the long string of alphanumerics.

"I thought so. You see, the password you used to access the file transfer was one I obtained. Remote detection is best done through the thaumaturgical tradition. Present company excepted."

Rider forces a smile.

"For me, this began two days past. My fixer arranged a meeting with a Ms. Johnson via a secure comlink on a dedicated satellite owned, though a series of blinds, by Wuxing. Yes, there again, Wuxing surfaces as some haughty puppeteer pulling our strings. I digress, let me return presently to the run of which I speak.

"My fixer warned me this run was short on legwork. Indeed, that was an understatement; there was no legwork at all. The avatar the Ms. Johnson used looked Caucasian, but the sentence formation led me to believe she hails from China, possibly Hong Kong itself. I fear I must admit that I was unable to trace her syntax to an exact province.

"Ms. Johnson required the password to a one-time FTP occurring the next day. I was to circumvent the wards placed by a mage such as myself. Then, using clairvoyance, I would garner the password from the middleman courier. He, quite literally, would have the data stored in his head, a break in the link between cyberspace and reality."

"That's fragging slick," Flo Rider says. "Can't trace the FTP once it gets in the courier's head. You can only pick it up afterward. No way to know who sent it." He beams with admiration.

"If the satellite was owned by Wuxing," I say, thinking aloud, "then the Ms. Johnson either hacked it or she works for Wuxing. Why hack something that secure? There are other ways to make a call. No, I bet she's on the inside of Wuxing ..." They're all looking at me.

"And?" the ork asks.

"And Ms. Farthing should finish her story. We don't have enough pieces to even put the wrong picture together."

Penny clears her throat softly but with emphasis. There's something intentionally regal about her, something I suss she's feigning. I'm no mage, no cybered-up rigger, but I can read people, like I said. I bet her father wasn't all she made him out to be. This is a poor girl trying to pass off as aristocracy or some such drek.

She continues, "The courier was booked at the Hong Kong Hyatt. Ms. Johnson arranged for me to have the adjacent hotel room. I presume she employed a decker for this."

"She did!" Flo Rider looks as if he surprised himself with the decibel of his voice. "Yeah, two days ago I hacked their reservations. Is that your real name they had me put in, Penny F.?"

"Not remotely close."

"Why us? I don't get it." Flo Rider goes after an itch behind his ear with the ferocity of a dog.

"I'm certain there are many things you do not get, Rider."

"You forgot the 'mister,' Penny Ante."

This elicits a sigh from Penny but nothing more.

"It seems as though our Rider acquired the room for me. Thus, we were already unknowingly linked two days ago. The Tao at work."

The ork grunts in agreement. Penny goes on.

"I arrived the night before the courier was due to arrange certain circles and prepare myself mentally. Hours before the courier checked in, I astrally projected to reconnoiter the room. The mage who set up the astral barriers nearly spotted me, but I managed to evade him. Such are the speeds at which the astral body moves. Your Matrix, Rider, moves slowly in comparison.

"When the courier arrived, he obtained the password to download the file. The encryption, Ms. Johnson said, would take too long to crack. Therefore, I had to observe him typing the alphanumerics into his deck. I memorized the password and came back to my actual body with, I thought, no one the wiser.

"Astral tracking is always a danger, but I truly thought I had made such a circuitous series of baffles and hexed chaffs so as to lose any would-be tracker. I checked out of the hotel mere minutes after I returned to my body and, as I crossed the street, the room I had so recently inhabited exploded above."

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute," I say. "You were in were in the room that those hired guns took out with a rocket launcher?"

"Yes."

I shake my head. "That's two of us someone tried to geek out." I don't mention my own brush with murder yet.

"Indeed," she says. "I knew I had to get lost for awhile, then. I gave the password to Ms. Johnson, took my pay, and prepared to leave the city. Then I received a mysterious message. In it was a map leading here. I would not have followed it had not

the entire history of my life, my real name, and all my sins been in a file sent mere seconds later."

"And what did that message say?" The ork's face a fist of fury just now.

"Come to this address or we splash this across the Matrix in a neon spray bomb. Then it closed with my real name and some rather ... personal ... information.

No one speaks. The tension ratchets up palpably.

"Great," says the ork. "Just fragging wiz."

"This is bad. Very bad," Flo Rider reaches into one of his many pockets and takes out a pill bottle. He pops three, then tucks his knees up under his chin in a sitting fetal position.

"Look," I say to everyone. "I'm good at what I do, and I assume you are as well. But I'm not the best. I doubt any of you are, though Penny probably thinks she is."

She cuts me off. "What is your point, Mr. Thornton?"

"Please, call me Sam. My point is they could have gotten others to do whatever it is they want us to do. They went to a lot of trouble to test and then coerce the four of us. Why?"

"My story," the ork says, "might give you a clue, gumshoe." His face brightens, "See, I like some of the old horrorshow violence," he says.

Do tell. Do, do tell.

Naivaklam is a laid-back ork who is willing to walk through a wall if that's the shortedt way to get where he needs to go. He's just the kind of runner Randall likes to work with.

RANDALL'S STORY

"I wouldn't even call it a defection, more smash and grab, except the target was was with Wuxing. Rush job, like y'all." His Southern drawl lends a softer quality to the action coming.

"It started two days ago, I reckon. I'm in The Drunken Money. The comlinks of every damn merc in the place ring. First to react is first to get to bid, as half a dozen fixers call their muscle talent. I've had a bad day and am in the mood for a little horrorshow violence, like I said. This job has that. I go for the lowest bid. Aw, hell, I just wanted to shoot someone, is all. I'm Johnny on the spot answering and lowball my bid. I get the job.

"Fixer tells me, get to the parking garage across from the Hong Kong Hilton. Take out anyone in room 707 ASAP. Sounds easy, but I ask who I'm taking out. I'm not a callous killer. A photo comes up. Nasty piece of business. Y'all would recognize him. I reckon it'd be doing the world a favor to geek him."

"But it wasn't him," Penny says. "It was me ... or almost me." The gravity of what she barely escaped dropping on her shoulders just then.

"I am truly sorry, Ms. Farthing." He is. I can see that. Right then is when I start seeing some of those missing pieces, revealing more of the picture. I wouldn't just geek anyone either.

Penny nods. The ork still looks pained, but she rests her hand on his callous-rough arm, and he picks up where he left off."

"Drove my car there, opened up my trunk, took out my rocket launcher, and made the room disappear."

"They would have seen you, right? Security cams all over a place like that." I raise the obvious point.

"Heh," Flo Rider uncurls from his sitting fetal position. "They were seeing a loop. I was hired to do that, same day. Took the money and pissed it away on Suntory and ladies."

"And speed," I add. He giggles.

"Yeah, my fixer told me he had a decker working to fix the CCTV but good. I owe you a beer, compadre. I took my money and settled down at home in Aberdeen with a cold beer and some football. Not that damn soccer drek you Euros think is football. This were the real thing.

"I must have fallen asleep, 'cause next thing I

know, the game's over and my comlink is buzzing in my head like the worst of hangovers."

"I can relate, omae," Flo Rider says. He's looking paler than before. That speed better kick in soon in case we need him.

"My fixer again, this time he wants me to grab a little fella works for Wuxing. My fixer says he's a whistleblower, but I didn't ask for what. I should have, but I was still riding the adrenaline and confidence from fragging your hotel, Miz Farthing."

He rubs a red area around the new jack in his head.

"Reckon he weren't a whistleblower exactly, but more like disgruntled. My fixer gives me some wiz deal, so I take the run. Only snag is he's going to be out on Lantau Island today and today only. No prep time 'cause otherwise they keep him locked up in an arcology like a pet mouse. I ask what kind a hotshot researcher this guy is, and my fixer says he's an architect. I didn't know whether to drek or laugh. A fragging architect?" Randall shrugs, hundreds of kilo of muscle rippling.

The ork works the inflamed flesh near the jack again, "I weren't about to take the ferry to Lantau. Got me a boat. I grew up on the Gulf Coast, was there when my pop's fishing business went under after that toxic spill, but I still know boats. Fixer had given me the tracking frequency of those chips the corps put in their talent. Last stop is me buying a couple of special items for my plan."

"What'd you buy?" Flo Rider flares to life at the mention of gadgets.

"I ain't saying now. You never been told how to tell a story? You got to tease it out. My grandma, she told good stories. You don't reveal everything up front." "This concerns our livelihood, Mister ... I don't think I got your name?" Penny's eyebrow mimics classical architecture again.

"Randall, ma'am."

"Randall?" Flo Rider makes the second syllable it's own sentence. "Randall?"

"Yeah, ya yankee fraghead. Randall." The ork stands and takes a step forward.

"Whoa, everyone," I say. "Let's just everybody be cool."

Flo Rider snaps his knees back under his chin, and the ork, Randall, sits back down. He tries to drill a hole into Rider's forehead with his eyes. What do they want with us, I wonder?

"The boat ride to Lantau was no big deal. I docked with some tourists around noon. It was a cool day, so I had a light coat on, but it only allowed for some simple tools of the trade if you know what I mean." He's grinning then, tusks prominent and suddenly, frighteningly scary.

"I followed the homing beacon. My target was at the temple, the one with the wiz Buddha."

"The Tian Tan Buddha," Penny says. "Over sixty years old."

"Yeah, that one." Randall gives her a grin. I think he's what people in his neck of the woods would call "sweet" on our Penny. "I figured the tourists might provide some concealment there on Ngong Ping."

"I've been there. They have those cable cars, the ones from, like, a hundred years ago. Man I was wrecked. I puked out the side of one of those and ..." Flo Rider trails off, realizing everyone is looking at him. "Oh, right. Sorry. Go on, Randall. It's engrossing, really."

Randall doesn't give him the drill-eyes again. I think he's decided the elf is harmless. He's easygoing for an ork samurai. I'll give him that.

"I reckon they choppered out to Lantau. The Buddha's too open a place. I'd have nil cover there, so I wait for them to leave and tail them at a good distance. They start heading for the top of the big hill where the tourist gondolas are. Where the chopper pad is too.

"I get his two minders from behind, but they're good and they're fast. Not as good and fast as me, though. Grabbed the first one around the head and twisted till it cracked, just like opening a new bottle of Cuervo.

"The second's wired reflexes draw his gun lightning fast, and he gets a shot off, but I'd positioned myself to take it in the back where the ceramic plates back the Kevlar. I side-kicked him in the gut so hard I cracked his spine. Boom!" Everyone jumps. Randall's smile is all teeth and tusks.

"Boom. Two down and the architect to go. He kinda looks like a coyote someone dressed up in a nice suit. He ain't surprised though, or panicked. I know he wanted to defect but, hell, y'all must have seen how most defectors react when they see combat. It's all theory for those boys until then ... and girls," he adds. "Don't want to be sexist. My pops raised me better than that.'

A slight smile from Penny. Great. It's a meet cute rom-com sim. Barf. She holds her hand out, palm toward him to stop the story. "You said he wasn't scared by the violence?"

Randall nods.

"And your fixer informed you the man was an architect?" Another nod.

"He may be a geomancer. Corporations in Hong Kong pay them better than anywhere else. They spot, track and maximize qi forces in the city. Wuxing Tower is built on a nexus of such energy."

"Another piece, but where does it lead us?" I ask Randall to continue.

"I ain't gone to one of them war colleges, but my pops didn't raise no dummy. I know the two guys what walked him to the Buddha weren't the only security. Fortunately, I got to him some ways

away from the chopper. No time for the how do you do and how's your day. I grab his shoulder, shove him in front of me, and tell him to head for the gondolas.

"The architect, or geomancer, complains about how slow the gondolas are, and how we can't outrun a chopper and ... yeah, yeah, yeah . Ol' Randall has it covered.

"I toss him atop a gondola and follow him. 'Ready for a ride, little guy?' I say to him. What a hoot.

"Rider, you'll like this part, it's about that specialty item I mentioned. I have this friend who makes custom gear for runners. I had him rig up a device to turn the gondola's cable into a zip line. Har!" His laugh fills the room.

"And you zipped down across the sea?" I'm trying to imagine what that looked like—big Texan ork flying across the sky with a coyote-looking human dangling underneath. "That's how you got away?"

"Apart from the bit about the helicopter, yeah."

Everyone looks expectantly at him. He smiles. "The chopper swept up from the island after us. There we are, hurtling toward mainland at however many miles an hour, and the chopper slides next us and lets the door gunner go full auto on our butts. 'Course, it's ain't easy to hit something moving fast, and even harder to hit it when you're moving fast, too.

"Me, I had a plan. My buddy made something else for me. He attached a super magnet to a shaped charge. Har! All I had to do was get a throw close to the metal nose of that slick. Magnetism would do the rest. I turned the magnet on as I threw. It slapped itself to the chopper like a piglet on its momma's teat and boom!"

"Blew the nose right off the bird, and it spun into the water like a broken dragonfly. We zipped along home to where I had another pal, a rigger, waiting with a car. Have to pay him for the mess though."

"What mess would that be?" Penny asks.

"I had to dig the homing device out of the little fella with a knife. No time for surgery. Just glad he didn't have a cortex bomb." He laughs again.

"Nice run, Randall," Flo Rider says then turns to me. "And what about our resident private detective?"

Now everyone is looking at me.

"Drek," I say. "I'm no good at telling stories. Better to get Randall's grandma in to do it."

"We appear to be stuck with you, sir," Penny says.

There they are, four sets of eyes, waiting for me to fill in the details. But I don't have the details. Then, as if on cue, Fan returns. She perches on a stool like a bird of prey. Everyone stops looking at me and locks onto her.

"How about Fan tells us why we're really here?" She looks at an old fashioned watch. "We have time to kill."

"And if we just decided to get up and leave?" I want to see how she plays that.

"You can leave anytime you want. Go back out there knowing all your sins will follow. How many corps have you all burned? How many enemies would love to geek you as soon as your rap sheets hit the Matrix?"

"What the frag did you get us into, lady?" I play it angrier than I am. I should have been more careful, covered my data trails better. Drek, I trace those same trails for a living. The four of us got soft, complacent. No room for that on the edge.

"You got yourselves into this. One way or another, you've all been heading this way most of your lives." She remains perched on her stool but arches her back for a stretch. She has the body of a dancer, a very deadly one.

"Lady," I tell her, "you have us over the proverbial barrel. You want to play games? Fine. Let me tell you what happened to me. You go on pretending you don't know."

All eyes return to me. I lied. I can tell a very good story.

SAM'S STORY

"Me, I'm not from your fancy London with all that history in its bones of stone and buried macadam streets. I'm not from your Gulf Coast, where my people go back to the last world war. I'm not born to see code burning when I shut my eyes. I was a cop. I helped people, or thought I did. One day I refused a bribe. The outfit I was with pushed me out. I came here because it felt like a new start. Truth is, no one was going to miss me back home.

"I'd seen traffic accidents where the victim's limbs wound up in a tree. I'd seen a ten year-old kid with most of his head gone 'cause he angered the wrong go-gang. So I didn't lose it when a dying client showed up at my office. Well, fell against the door of my office, more like. Still, it's not what I deal in, dead people. Not like you swell folks."

"You don't like us, our kind?" Penny, not seeming angry about it, but still.

"I'm getting used to you." I am, and I hate it.

"My pops said there ain't much in the world that's really black or white, but it all kinda blends together into gray."

"Moral flexibility, Randall. My pops taught me the opposite, but he also taught me to play the hand I was dealt. So there I am, bent over this dying man, his hands on my duster, pulling me close, whispering a name. He was paid up, so I drag him inside and am about to dial up the police when he coughs and dies on me. The thing is, the guy was a reporter who hired me to find out if anyone put his name in the

Gwydion 'Enigmancer' Winter came to Hong Kong to find his boyfriend. He hired Sam to help, paying enough to overcome Sam's reluctance to work for shadowrunners.

black book, if any folks like our friend Randall here were being contracted to geek him. They were, but he went underground before I could warn him.

"I should have reacted when I saw him. I should have made a move. I wasn't a rookie when I left the force. Finally, it gets through my obtuse brain that my client was shot very recently. Which meant the geekers were close.

"Really close, in fact. The geek squad showed up with the ping of the elevator, automatic fire raking the hall just as I dove back into my office. I sprang toward the window and out onto the fire escape. This wasn't the first time someone with a gun showed up to greet me a happy hello, and I'd installed a fast-rope on the fire escape to get out quick. I used it then, but landed hard in the alley. The two goons above poked their noses out, fired, but my luck held.

"I bolted, running on an ankle I knew was at least sprained.

"I got to safe spot I know and started thinking. I checked my mail. The dying guy, the reporter, he'd sent me a dense file. No way to open it I could see, but it hit me—the name he whispered from those dying lips was the password."

"And you looked," Flo Rider says. "You couldn't help yourself because your business is other people's business. You looked, right?"

"Yeah, I looked, but I know better than to look. Never, ever look inside the MacGuffin."

"The what?" Fan this time, having been reeled in by my story, which means she doesn't know as much as she wants us to think she knows. Her eyes were on the sleeping old man a second before. Why?

"It's a term a twentieth century film director coined. Fat guy, from your side of the pond, Penny. It's the thing in old movies, or even new movies, everyone is looking for—the mysterious chip, the prototype miracle device, the Maltese falcon, whatever. I looked at it."

"And?" Flo Rider, literally in the edge of his seat.

"It was blueprints. A stupid set of blueprints for an odd-looking mega tower. Nothing anyone would kill over, but they did. I couldn't make heads or tails of it ... until now." I look at Fan.

Fan smiles, gets off the stool and lens over the old man. She presses a chrome fingernail into the back of his neck.

The old man, who we thought was asleep, sits up spry as can be. He blinks awkwardly and smiles. What the ...? Then I nod to myself. He's a puppet. Someone is using him as a body to observe us.

The room, save Fan, picks their jaws up off the floor.

The puppet's voice is higher pitched than what ought to come out of an old man. "What is it you realized just now, Samuel Thornton?"

"This is all about Walled City, isn't it? That geomancer working for Wuxing found a way to turn the drek *qi* here into something usable. Wuxing is going to privatize Hak Nam and put up new buildings."

I have everyone's attention now.

"What do they want from us?" Randall asks.

"Who are you?" I ask.

"Nine by nine," the puppet says.

"Terrorists? You're fragging terrorists?' Rider has gone paranoid now.

"Revolutionaries," says the old man. His gestures and posture reflect that of whoever is driving him. It's unsettling to see them coming from an old Chinese man. "We are revolutionaries, and you are our newest recruits."

"Sorry, hoss," Randall says. "I ain't one to work for the bad guys."

The puppet laughs.

"Something funny?" Randall asks.

I jump in. "Not working for the bad guys is precisely why they want us." The others haven't put it together yet.

"Look, I was a cop, a damn good one. I thought I was a warrior for justice. You, Randall, you said yourself you wouldn't geek anyone, so they fed you the face of a bad guy. Flo Rider, and Penny. I bet you haven't ever geeked anyone that didn't have it coming, am I right?" They nod.

"That's why we're here." I turn to the puppet. The guy who just might be the leader of 9x9. "No one in Walled City is going to leave because Wuxing wants. They'll have to take it by force. A lot of people are going to die. The media is owned by the corps, just like everything else. They will bury the story. No one will care about the dead people. At least no one who could have done anything about it ..."

"Except us." Penny says.

"Precisely," the puppet stands sharp and straight like a general. That's probably how he sees himself too. How many died in the last 9x9 "expression of liberation?"

Randall is tensed to attack, Penny ready to go pyro on the puppet man and Fan.

"We picked well, Samuel Thornton."

"Yeah, sure. My client got geeked 'cause he was onto Wuxing's plan, right? You tipped him off, but when he died you had to move fast. Find a new way to play this. That's why everything was rushed. How long do we have?"

"Hours only," Fan says.

Randall punches a hole in the wall with his fist. "We can't save the whole city!"

"You have a witness and blueprints, you just need to get them to the public."

Flo Rider's mind races ahead of my speech, "You want us to break into the municipal emergency system and broadcast this."

The puppet nods. "And the municipal emergency building is crawling with Wuxing mercs now."

"No," Rider says. "Burn my rep. I ain't dying for this place." But he doesn't leave. "Come on, guys. We can't ..." He trails off.

We're screwed. The odds are way against us. It's suicide run, what he wants, but we'll do it. We'll do it not because he'll throw us to the wolves, not because we unknowingly helped collect the evidence, but because each of us, deep down, has some splinter of a decent person burning through the practiced affect and callous cool.

"Are you ready to save fifty thousand people?" The puppet says it like a game-show host offering the final round. His smile is a slit in a wrinkled face. One day, I'll find the driver and deal with them. "What's your answer?"

For now, frag it. If we're the best of Hong Kong, the city is a very bad place indeed. All our eyes find each other's again. I read people. I already know what we're going to say.

- Did they make the run?
- N00b4u

- This was uploaded minutes ago. If they did, they're on it now.
- The Gray Miser

- I can't believe Wuxing would do that. The city should do something.
- N00b4u

- The city is the corporations. Welcome to Hong Kong, N00b.
- The Gray Miser

TANGLED WEBS

As soon as he felt the cable disconnect from his datajack, Nigel wanted to puke.

The electronic high of his twenty-six-hour Matrix bender was gone, replaced with the various sensations associated with bodily neglect. His stomach felt shriveled, his lips dried and cracked. Cords of knotted muscles ran down from his neck to his ass, despite his so-called "ergonomically enhanced" chair. Thankfully, he'd hooked up the catheters or he'd have a real mess to deal with.

"Bollocks," he spat as eyes were assaulted by daggers of light from the neon sign across the street. Who cares if it advertised the best noodle house in Hong Kong? He wanted to murder that damn sign with extreme prejudice.

Easing up, Nigel finished unplugging and gingerly set his cyberdeck down on a nearby table. The chronometer in his cybereyes flashed 0147. If not for his aching body, he would have pumped his fist, but a sense of satisfaction would do.

The first in what he hoped would be many "reports" was done. He'd spent the last two years building the contacts, doing the initial legwork, and chasing down the leads. The first files were on their way to the proper outlets. This was the part he both loved and hated. Yes, the data was out there for all to see, but that didn't always mean that it made its way to the right people.

It was a gamble, a roll of the dice to be sure. But there was no other way to ensure that his data would get out there uncensored, and sometimes you had to just go for it. Shawn would have approved.

He decided it was finally time to crack open that bottle of gin—after a good shower and some food, of course.

Standing fully and stretching his limbs, he turned towards the bathroom when he heard something at his front door. Looking down at the base, he saw the fiber-optic camera lens pointed straight at him from underneath.

Then several things happened at once.

Adrenaline surging, Nigel darted towards a bookshelf. At the same time, his apartment's door slammed open and a flash-bang grenade sailed in. The grenade exploded as Nigel groped for his Ares Predator II. The flash robbed his sight, and the "bang" took his breath away.

Nigel came to a few seconds later, vision hazy and ears ringing. He felt strong hands seize his arms and haul him up. The intruders were wearing grey, generic coveralls, designed more for protection from acid rain than fashion. Although their faces were covered by black baklavas, their size indicated either orks or large humans. A hand grabbed a fistful of Nigel's hair, forcing his gaze forward. A single figure wearing a tailored suit strode forward into the apartment. Even despite his blurry vision, Nigel recognized who it was, and his blood ran cold.

"Nigel, Nigel. You were warned, yet chose to ignore my advice," his new guest said with a theatrical sigh. "Sorry about this."

Defiantly, Nigel spat on the ground. Then everything went black.

/login: ********** <encrypted> /ACCESS GRANTED/
/open file: Tangled Webs/

WELCOME TO SHADOWLAND!

"Just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean they aren't out to kill you."
–Unknown

- Okay, this was uploaded on Shadowland's "current events" board approximately twelve hours ago by a user named Bloodhound. After a quick scan to make sure there were no hidden nasties, I decided to create its own subboard for your viewing and inevitable arguing enjoyment. Now, while this file has been checked for any back-tracing or booby-trap IC, I haven't had the time (or the inclination) to verify *anything* said in this file. With that said, I'll give the standard disclaimer: act on this paydata at your own risk. Shadowland is not an investigative service; we just put it out there. That's where the rest of you drek-heads come in. If anyone has any hard paydata either corroborating or disproving, speak now or forever hold your piece. So without further ado ...
- Captain Chaos

TANGLED WEBS:

DARK SCHEMES OF HONG KONG (ISSUE 01)

POSTED BY: BLOODHOUND

If you're reading this, then I was at least partially successful at getting this data out. Yay me.

This is the first in what I hope will become a series of micro-exposés about the various dirty deeds and happenings in and around Hong Kong. Ya see, chummers, I've been living here for a good while now and, to be honest, I can't stand to turn a blind eye to what I see anymore. Will it do any good? Probably not. I'm not naïve enough to think that one person can take on all the corruption here. Sometimes you still have to try to find the little victories in life. And it would be nice to look at myself in the mirror again without any shame. Even though I'm considered a *qwailo,* this is still my home.

I've spent the last couple of years prepping for this. I know that I'll make more than a few powerful enemies in Hong Kong over this, but I don't care. What I *do* care about is getting the paydata I've accumulated out there for hopefully the right people to use. I may not be on this Earth much longer, but I've at least taken steps to ensure that all the data I have thus far accumulated will make it out. Should anything happen to me, I've hidden and set various data packets to automatically upload on Shadowland and other boards across the Matrix at random times. I won't say how many and when, but for now there's a *lot* of data about to be dumped.

The plan is to keep on digging up more data for future reports. But we all know what happens to plans when they make contact with the enemy, no? Still, if I'm not around to see this, I would also hope that I would inspire others to take over where I left off. Hey, a guy can dream right? But I know ultimately what will happen, that my data will become fodder for some enterprising individuals to take advantage of.

All part of doing business I guess.

I've divided this report into five basic sections which will serve as the basic format for all future reports. I'll provide as much paydata as I can on any featured subject, but there are always gaps or more to the story. So if anyone has anything to add, put it in the comments. I'll do follow-ups as needed. Consider this a bit of an interactive news report of sorts.

Well, let's not delay any longer and jump into the first issue of Tangled Webs.

- Wow, this guy's optimistic. So, first: what do we know about Bloodhound? I've heard his name on the streets and seen him a few times here.
- Ching-Ching POW

- Bloodhound, a.k.a. Nigel Smyth-Harrington III. Human male, twenty-nine years old, comes from old money, family ties to Hong Kong date all the way back to 1860, moved to Hong Kong from jolly old England in 2041

with father Nigel the Second. Spoiled rich brat, sent to finest schools (ironic, pathetic, or stereotypical, take your pick), started associating with various neo-a groups, and became an "investigative hacktivist" six years ago. Started doing runs four years ago. Despite all this and from what I've heard of him, had a decent rep as a data-thief and all-around snoop. Apparently he never stopped until he got what he wanted.

- Fastjack

- Hey, shouldn't we wait to see if Bloodhound checks in, maybe answer any questions? Seems kinda rude to spew all his personal data.
- Monkey King

- Not since I discovered that he's been missing since around 0730 yesterday morning, Hong Kong local time. Call it a hunch.
- FastJack

- Talk about prophetic.
- Young and Fat

CORPORATE POWER PLAYS

Sometimes, being the biggest thing in town means that you also have the biggest target on your back. In Hong Kong, that means **Wuxing**. And even though the corp is considered decidedly second-tier compared to the Big Eight, it still casts a wide shadow here. I could go on for a long time just about Wuxing and all their various deals in the Free Trade Zone, but I have to save *something* for future issues so I'll hit the big stories.

LEAD NEGOTIATOR FOR PACIFIC PROSPERITY GROUP DEAD

It's common knowledge that current Wuxing CEO Wu Lung-Wei has been the driving force behind the Pacific Prosperity Group initiative for the past few years and that his main goal is to create a corporate alliance to stand up to the Japanacorps (Fuchi, Mitsuhama, Renraku, and Yamatetsu) in the Asian-Pacific region. It's also common knowledge that the Japanacorps have been quite capable at keeping the PPG from becoming a reality.

Now for the stuff that most people don't know.

First, the PPG has been gaining a lot more momentum than the Japancorps want to admit, thanks in no small part to the Wuxing lead negotiator in charge of the PPG deal, Gordon Li. Unfortunately for Wuxing, Mr. Li was discovered dead in a Korean brothel three months ago. Why no breaking news? Why no press conferences announcing the tragic death of one of Wuxing's top employees? For one, Wuxing is covering it up, going so far as to fabricate several business trips making it look like

ep3meral mostly stays virtual. His lack of social skills make most people okay with that. His hacking skills mean he can be an ass and still get hired.

Mr. Li is continuing to serve his corporation. Here's the kicker though: they've been using a special prototype simulation software being developed by one of the Japanacorps (sorry to be vague—this was one of the few dead-ends I ran into during this investigation, but a lot of my sources pointed to one of them).

- Frag me. Couple of months ago, my former team and I were hired to extract this tech-geek chica from aYamatetsu subsidiary in Sydney. Along with the principal, we had to make sure that we also brought along a whole drekload of data files with us; we even had to hire a second decker to handle the extra load. Well, we were able to complete the run with only a *few* new bullet holes in our hoops, but having to stay behind and download all that data nearly cost us the run. I'd bet my left eye that the person we extracted was responsible for all that forged footage.
- Hatchetman

- If you're talking about Dr. Yuki Sato, then you'd be right. But it seems that Dr. Sato has come up missing. Both Yamatetsu and Wuxing have been quietly searching for her—for different reasons of course.
- Sifu Smith

- Seems like a lot of effort for just one man, no matter how important. There have to be better ways to go about convincing people that Li is still alive. Forging trid footage isn't that difficult. Is it?
- HK Cavalier

- For just some basic footage, yes. But if you do some research, Mr. Li has still been making various appearances in the Matrix and actually interacting with people. But even with today's modern sim technology, there are still telltale signs indicating some kind of forgery or sham, be it coding inconsistencies all the way to personal mannerisms and personal knowledge. Who, or what, has been meeting with the various Pacific Rim corps has been flawless in their performance. So either we have one hell of an actor, or something new.
- Doctor Bonsai

Second, while Wu could be called the architect of this deal, Li was the person actually getting things done. He had all the contacts, all the deals, and was the one convincing the various potential members of the PPG that it could actually work. Losing Li, especially in such a disgraceful way, could ruin all the headway that Wuxing has made thus far.

Third, and this is the most perplexing, is that none of the Japanacorps have taken advantage of the situation. One would think that they would immediately move to exploit Wuxing's weakness and kill the idea of the PPG once and for all. But instead, nothing. Either they don't know about it, or one of the Japanacorps (maybe all of them) want to keep this new technology under wraps.

No matter what's happening, if this gets out to the general public, both sides could take major hits from the blowback. Wuxing needs to keep up appearances, and if one of the Japanacorps has some new wiz-bang sim-tech, they sure as the seven hells don't want information about it to get out. So in this case, there is an Asian version of a Mexican standoff, waiting for something to break it.

- Okay, this makes for a great read, but there's no actionable paydata here. This sounds more like it belongs in one of the conspiracy theory threads. I'd think long and hard before acting on any of this so-called "data." And if you wanted to get this out, Bloodhound, then you would have leaked it to the press, not some anonymous shadow-board.
- SunnyTzu

- And of course we all know that the press is completely impartial and fair with the facts. Are you new?
- Fastjack

- Hey, hey, we're all wearing our big-runner pants here. But sometimes rumors have a nasty habit of having a bit of truth to them, and I know a lot of people who pay nicely to be kept up on the latest gossip.
- Young and Fat

THE QI TO SUCCESS

This one almost didn't make it into this volume, but I decided to bump another story about William Shaw, (husband of Executive Council chair Evangeline Shaw) who was found on board a Wuxing freighter wearing a chicken suit and questioned by Maritime Authority officers regarding his involvement with a situation on board said freighter involving a dwarven mail-order bride, a tuba, two Russian hitmen, a Yamaha racing bike, three free water spirits, six cases of surgical tubing, twenty kilos of real-imitation peanut butter, a pallet of BTLs, and a gorilla.

I thought this story was more important.

- Awwww come *on*! I want to know about the guy in the chicken suit *now*!
- SunnyTzu

- This will likely be old news by the time issue 02 comes out, so let me put this out there for anyone interested. I know a few people who are looking for qualified individuals to look into this matter and assist with some damage control. I also know those who are looking to, how should I say this, further the situation. Anyone interested contact me via PM and I'll get you in touch with the right people—for a nominal fee of course.
- Wayne Chung

I'm sure everyone heard the story a few days ago about a spectacular break in at the Government House in downtown. Official sources report that terrorist agents involved in the 9x9 organization broke into the Government House in a blatant attempt to destroy government data and sabotage the building, all in an effort to take down the current Hong Kong government."

Of course this was a load of pure, one-hundred-percent bulldrek.

As the events were happening, I watched the trid as the Hong Kong Police Force, augmented by Knight Errant security, cordoned off the area. I received a message from an associate of mine, another reporter who I won't identify for their safety, not that I don't think it matters anymore. He was on the inside, and with his team busy with other matters, he needed some eyes out front.

My contact, who I'll refer to as "Edward" (as in Edward R. Murrow, for those of you who care), was giving me the play-by-play in real time thanks to a secure Matrix feed his decker established. That was pretty wiz in and of itself. He wanted me to let people know what happened

should things go south. And judging by the firepower that the HKPF and KE were massing, that seemed like a safe bet. They were going in and going in *hot*.

According to Edward, he and the members of his team were in fact hired (which he said with a lot of sarcasm, why I don't know) by a representative of 9x9 to break into the building, but their goal wasn't to destroy anything. At least not in the traditional sense—they were there to disrupt a project to either murder or displace over fifty-thousand people in the walled city of Hak Nam. They were planning on using the emergency broadcast system to warn everyone, because that system couldn't be tampered with. Or so they thought. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It seems that Wuxing geomancers found what can only be described as a large flow of "negative *qi*." Now, I don't know much about magic, but that seems like a bad thing. It also seems that Wuxing's cadre of geomancers found a way to purify all that bad *qi*, which would give them a literal qi goldmine. Assuming qi gold is something that literally exists. Like I said, magic isn't my thing. Too bad the residents of Hak Nam and their homes were in the way.

Well that's OK; a proper false-flag operation could take care of that right quick. But I'm getting ahead of myself again.

I'm not exactly sure what happened after that because someone from HKPF, KE, or wherever got wind of the secure feed Edward was using, but not before a series of encrypted data packets configured as data bursts were transmitted to multiple servers all across the Matrix. I got a hold of one of the packets but was only able to de-crypt about thirty percent, which started to outline Wuxing's plans. The rest was just, well gibberish, junk code. It looks like its encrypted data, but neither I nor my best contacts can crack it.

- It's not junk, it's a red herring. The code is gibberish but looks just enough like the real thing to keep people guessing, likely for a long time. Not bad.
- FastJack

So for the last few days, I went digging on my own.

It took a while to piece everything together but I got it, or at least enough of it. Using a lot of requisition logs lifted straight from Wuxing, I pieced together that Wuxing was in fact assembling the right kind of equipment and personnel necessary to eventually demolish Hak Nam and later build some kind of tower there. I also found various memos and payment transfers to several local fixers to hire multiple shadowrunner teams to sabotage Hak Nam's power grid and then instigate a riot, which would *have* to be put down, but not until most of the city was already destroyed by fire or explosion. I've also uncovered evidence indicating payments from Wuxing through various shell accounts to multiple Hong Kong officials.

I know it's a lot to believe, but if anyone wants to review the data I collected, go to the host linked <here>.

- WARNING! Do NOT try and access that host! The link is clean, which is why nothing showed up on my initial scans, but that host is crawling with trace-and-burn black IC. I think someone was already there and decided to set up a few booby traps in their wake. If you haven't already noticed, I've disabled the link here. But if you're feeling suicidal, go ahead and copy the code and take a look but do it OFF of Shadowland. First and only warning.
- Captain Chaos

- Well that's convenient. No way of verifying that data. Anyone else thinking this is pure bulldrek?
- Tin Helmet

- Just means that we decker-types are going to have to put in some work if we want to find out what is going on. But to be blunt, unless someone is paying me, I don't care.
- Digital Deamon

And what about Edward and his team? Well, as we all saw on the trid, HKPF and KE stormed the Government House. About five minutes after they made entry, a massive explosion took out the South wing. Official reports state that Police Forces engaged a number of terrorists, killing most of them but were unable to prevent the explosion. Officially the case is closed. I honestly don't know if Edward or any of his team made it out. I haven't heard from him since the raid. But, ultimately, it looks like their run succeeded. Hak Nam is still standing and there have been no reports of blackouts or riots. And I haven't seen any evidence of any heavy construction or demolition equipment moving into the area.

Maybe, just this once, the good guys won.

- Even if the information was in fact "planted", as many ~~paid-off commentators~~ media pundits later espoused, the damage had already been done. How could Wuxing, claiming ignorance suddenly justify *any* operations in Hak Nam without exposing themselves as complete, lying, scheming, hypocrites? Bravo, to you "Edward" and your esteemed team, you played the game extremely well.
- Dodger

- It will be interesting to see what the fallout of this is. I doubt that we'll see anything publicly, but I expect a lot of "restructuring" within Wuxing's ranks. Someone is going to have to take the fall for this and there are always those who will take advantage of the situation. Like the old political maxim says, never let a good crisis go to waste. Be on the lookout for a ton of Wuxing-related runs in the near future.
- The Dragon Reborn

- Looking at the aftermath of the raid, HKPF and KE didn't get away unscathed. "Unofficial" reports indicate two street samurai—one human, one ork—and a human mage rained bloody hell and death on the law-dogs before the explosion went off. HKFP lost ten operators while KE lost four. Not to mention the multiple injuries. But ask either HKPF or KE and they'll deny it. The official reports claim that both the deaths and injuries resulted solely from the explosion. No doubt this is to save face. No one wants to admit to getting their backsides handed to them like that. One hell of a fight.
- Shades

- Wait, this sounds familiar, are we sure this wasn't Tsang Medical Services instead of Wuxing? I mean, just saw that CEO Josephine Tsang was arrested in connection to some scheme in the Walled City, and she later committed suicide while in custody.
- Just Johnny

- Two corners of the same darkened room, never meeting but sharing the same fate. But yes, this time, the light chased away the night.
- Man-of-Many-Names

GOVERNMENT BACKSTABBING

Corporations like Wuxing may still be the biggest game in town, but never turn your back on Hong Kong's politicians. Traditional government may not have the power and prestige they once had, but that just means they're getting more creative at passing the misery on to the people.

WE ARE, THE LAW!

While the idea of police corruption isn't a new one, and even though we all accept that the police aren't here to serve and protect the people but rather just act as an extension of corporate power and greed, every so often the "law" does something that reminds even the most jaded amongst us just how far that institution has fallen.

Last year, in the wake of "the rise in rampant unaffiliated criminal activity" (which is bureaucrat-speak for "shadowruns"), the HKPF created Task Force Ten. Charged with dealing with what was advertised as the "shadowrunning menace," it was nothing more than a dog-and-pony show to help HKPF Chief Bai Ling-Po's bid for a position on the Board of Governors.

What surprised people was the Chief's chosen successor: Captain Benjamin Xian. Respected as a tough investigator, Xian was one of the few cops in Hong Kong who got things done. Some thought Xian was making some kind of power play within the department; others believed he was looking for a cushy position to skate through his last few years before retirement.

Those people were proven wrong when he used his new mandate to start busting heads. Or at least that's what everyone thought. It turns out that Xian has been using his authority to carve out his own little criminal empire by becoming Hong Kong's number one fixer—as in he fixes problems for whoever can pay him, or if he can gain from it.

It's a classic scam. Task Force Ten investigates a certain individual, gang, or team, and then leans on them. Sometimes it's hard, sometimes not-so-hard depending on the *who* and the *angle*. Sometimes, TF10 actually gets honest-to-ghost evidence on their "suspects," but more often it's circumstantial or fabricated--just enough to make things difficult for the perps. In any case, Xian and TF10 must be doing something right because no one, not even the Triads, has taken a serious shot at them.

Right now, Task Force Ten seems to be made of teflon. None of the major rackets seems interested in taking them down, and they are starting to see Xian's services as nothing more than the cost of doing business in Hong Kong. The HKPF couldn't care less, because as far as they and the general public are concerned, TF10 is just doing their job.

- Yeah, the players may change, but the game still stays the same.
- The Neon Samuari

- That's because TF10 and The Red Dragons have reached an understanding of sorts. The Reds let TF10 gobble up a few small fish (usually those who've displeased the Incense Master) to help keep the arrest numbers up, and Xian and company look the other way on a few choice operations, or they run interference. The Yellow Lotus isn't happy, of course, but they're not going to go to war over this. At least not yet. Although I hear Kindly Cheng, a Yellow Lotus fixer, is always looking for someone to find some dirt on Xian and his crew.
- Shen Lo-Fun

- The Red Dragon patronage helps keep other criminal outfits at bay. I know self-styled pirate queen Long I Sao is none too happy with Captain Xian. Seems he cost her a hefty bit of cred last month with a major BTL and weapons bust just outside of Kawi Tsing. The Maritime Authority is also pissed at being shown up by the locals. It's also no secret that Captain Brian Lo-Pan of the Maritime Authority is interested in some off-the-books payback.
- Corsair Jane

- Just in case everyone forgot, Xian's favorite targets are shadowrunners. Independently or as a team, most of us tend not to have the necessary protection to stay out of Task Force 10's crosshairs. We're perfect for their use,

OPEN FILE: 4568-2
"TASK FORCE 10 COMMAND ROSTER"

- **Captain Benjamin Xian.** Human male, 39 years old. Task Force Commander/Lead Investigator. Expert investigator and interrogator, keen eye for detail and observation. Known to be determined and ruthless during his investigation. Qualified in marksmanship (pistol) and known to be competent with hand-to-hand techniques. Minor augmentations (boosted reflexes, cybereyes). Family: wife (Shado, deceased) and son (William).
- **Sergeant Ling Han.** Ork female. 27 years old. Task Force Second-in-Command/Tactical Officer. Former Mercenary (Combat, Inc.). Expert in multiple forms of martial arts and weaponry, qualified marksman. Multiple reprimands for excessive force, investigated multiple times on the suspicion of accepting bribes. Multiple augmentations (cybereyes, cyber spurs, dermal plating, muscle replacement, smartlink, wired reflexes). Note: Known to be completely loyal to Benjamin Xian.
- **Kennedy Patterson.** Human, female. 31 years old. Task Force Information Specialist. UCAS immigrant, former employee of Lone Star Security Services, resigned amid allegations of misconduct, falsifying official records, evidence tampering, and witness intimidation. Expert level decker with "customized" Fairlight Excalibur cyberdeck.
- **Speed Demon.** Elf, male. Unknown age (estimated late 30s, early 40s). Task Force Transportation Specialist (rigger). Rumored to be former street-racer, turned "civilian advisor," brought on to HKPF specifically for Task Force. Details about past mostly unknown. Numerous complaints about excessive property damage during pursuits. Always operates custom vehicles/drones. Known gambler.
- **Mei-Lin Song.** Dwarf, female. 34 years old. Task Force Magical Support. Mage/Geomancer, known to have initiated multiple times. Expert in illusion, manipulation, and detection spells. Likes to let spirits handle all magical combat. Bad reputation as being a Feng Shui extremist, multiple reprimands for disruptive behavior in office, denied multiple promotions.

highly skilled (mostly) disposable assets. So what if we get fragged doing Xian's dirty work? There are ten more for every runner that gets geeked. And those who are unlucky enough to get pinched receive the privilege of working in exchange for not being thrown into prison. Ghost, I want to waste him myself.

- Guy Lo

- And risk pissing off the Red Dragons? No thank you. If you see any fuzz coming your way, just bail and try to stay out of their sight.
- Ching-Ching POW

- Task Force Ten is to be respected but not necessarily feared. They screw up occasionally. Seems TF10 got word some big shadow op was going down and some heavy hitters were coming in from overseas. One was some runner who recently got out of prison, the others were, get this, Lone Star cops *way* out of their jurisdiction. Apparently TF10 sent over some of their street-beaters to have a discussion about operating on their turf and it turned into a massive shootout with the newcomers and some local shadow talent. Some of the runners got away, but all of the HK five-o got waxed. There was a BOLO and bounty out for them, but it was rescinded. Send me a PM and I'll get you the details if you're interested.
- Mo Coin

- Didn't those same runners have something to do with the throw down in Heoi? Anyone have any paydata on that?
- OK Fella

Just in case anyone wants to take a crack at these corrupt cops, here's the scan on the current members of TF10's command staff. They tend to bring in other street officers for added muscle and can call in specialists as needed. But be warned, Xian has recruited from both the top and bottom echelons of the HKPF. This means you have primo talent, along with those who aren't afraid to break more than a few rules and skulls to get what they want.

- So that's where Speed Demon ended up. Interesting. He's in deep with the Red Dragons for 50K. Wonder how he got working for Xian?
- HK Cavalier

- Simple—Xian had Demon's debt transferred to him. So basically, Xian owns the spastic little freak. Guess Demon shouldn't have bet he would have been the first to take out the Chungking Chargers and claim that Hong Kong Cavalier spot. That's what happens when you double-down on stupid.
- Silk Roadie

- Speaking of, did you hear about that new team, the Four Thunders? Group of hardcore bikers who took a shot at the Chargers last night. From what I hear, they were going to try and trace them back, but instead one of them, don't remember which, took on some Chargers who were messing with the widow and kid of an old chum. Too bad they didn't make it, it would have been wiz!
- SunnyTzu

- Yeah, and now the FourThunders are number one on the Charger's drek list. Anyone want to take odds on how long theThunders last?
- Terra Cotta

THE CRIMINAL ELEMENT

Simply put, there is a *lot* going on when it comes to the criminal element and much like I said about the corporations, there's just way too much to cover in a single report. I'll cover more in Tangled Webs 2. But there are a few worthwhile things to mention that may shake things up a bit that would behoove us in the shadows to know about. And because there's more to cover, this section will be a bit briefer. Consider these the highlight clips.

YO HO, BLOW THE MAN ... UP?

Piracy has always been a major factor around Hong Kong, but until recently the corsair community has been content to, for the most part, stay out of each other's way. Well, that looks like it's about to change and there may be open warfare on the high seas very soon, and quite a few people from corporations to the Maritime Authority have taken notice.

As best as I can figure, the whole thing began about four months ago when pirate captain Fei Yu sank a Maersk freighter just off Lantau Island. It was a typical Fei Yu operation: sink the boat, send in divers to retrieve the ill-gotten gains. Normally this is business as usual and they go about plundering without any real problems. But this time, Fei Yu and his merry band sunk a ship that self-proclaimed pirate queen Long I Sao planned to raid, a plan she had been developing for over a fraggin' year.

Needless to say, Captain Long reacted in her typical fashion by sending in two of her biggest ships and trying to blow the ever-loving hell out of Fei Yu, with only marginal success. The good captain Fei escaped, but took heavy damage and casualties, and worse yet, he lost his plunder.

Since then, pirate attacks in the region have increased by almost fifty percent, but most seem to be serious pirate-on-pirate action. A few weeks ago, a small flotilla of swift boats affiliated with Long was ambushed by a Trojan freighter often used by Fei; none of the flotilla escaped. More recently, two of Fei's major bolt holes (or are they called coves?) were destroyed. Since then, there have been several skirmishes between pirate bands. Seems the lines are being drawn and local bands are either siding with Long or Fei.

Unfortunately this little pirate war threatens to severely hamper shipping in the area. Normally freighters and other cargo vessels have to worry about being boarded, but with all the heavy ordnance being thrown about by the various pirate ships, the various shipping corporations and independent operators are in danger of losing cargo *and* ships.

In response, corporations such as Wuxing and Maersk have doubled their standard escort and protection details, which often employ heavy weapons of their own, only adding fuel to the fire. So far the bulk of the fighting has been contained to areas away from the Free Market Zone, but a small battle near the Tolo Harbor Complex has authorities worrying that the fighting is getting too close to the mainland. Maritime Authorities have been increasing security along all major harbors and increased their patrols along the major shipping routes. They have also requested additional help from corporate security forces.

So basically, if you want to get in on this war or profit from it, now is the time because eventually the government and the corps will bring the hammer down.

- He's right about one thing: This is a golden opportunity for a lot of people, but especially independent smugglers. With the authorities and corps busy with anti-pirate missions, they're all but ignoring the small fish that're slipping past. I've been able to quadruple my profits in the past week alone!
- Wavecutter

- Gunrunners are also making a killing selling arms and munitions to both sides of the conflict. And if you think other corps aren't getting in on the action, you're nuts. I just made introductions between some pirate captains and some not-so undercover Ares reps. I also expect to see reps from the likes of Aztechnology and S-K poking around here very soon as well.
- Corsair Jane

- In one of those weird alliances, rivals Wuxing and Maersk have joined together and jointly hired runners to escort negotiators to try and reach a peaceful settlement. Ha! That's rich!
- Wing Chung

- Better to keep it quiet and keep the damage low. Wonder what terms they're offering ...
- Guy Lo

- Well, they may be suing for peace, but they're also preparing for war. Several Wuxing Johnsons have been seen at the Drunken Monkey. I'm getting a vibe that if the negotiations fail we should expect to see a sharp decline in the pirate population soon after. Anyone interested, keep an eye on the standard hiring boards.
- Shades

OLD MCDONALD DIDN'T HAVE A FARM?

For those of you who have dosses or safehouses in the Northern Reaches, you may want to keep an eye out. A farming conglomerate known as the Eastern Farming Coalition has been buying up a lot of farm land through back-handed deals and then forcing the farmers out. Now normally farmland is of little concern for runners, but the Northern Reaches is one of the more popular out-of-the-way hide-outs for people in our line of work.

Rumors suggest that the EFC is trying to pair up with Amalgamated Livestock to seal off the area to grow new, genetically enhanced crops, all of it automated. So if you have a summer home there, you may want to consider finding another place.

- Actually, this little move has far more ramifications in the shadows. Johnsons from the EFC have been hiring runners to convince some stubborn farmers to give up the lands their families have been tending for countless generations (funny that). But to add more to this situation is that the farmers have been trying to hire runners to stop the runners trying to force them out. Does this sound like a comedy sim to anyone else?
- Colton Croft

- Amalgamated is helping back the EFC because sealed-off, automated agro-domes will put a buffer between them and any outside observers. For the past year, locals have reported hearing strange noises coming from AL facilities, not to mention the mysterious creature sightings.
- Shen Lo-Fun

- I've heard Amalgamated and Ares of all corps have been working together on something called a bio-drone? Some kind of living drone from specifically bred animals—anyone have any data on that?
- Tin Helmet

- Yeah, let me check my files right next to those about the yeti, Loch Ness Monster, and Santa Claus. That rumor, along with the "mutated creature," has been floating around Amalgamated ever since it started operations. They breed exotic animals specifically for regent harvesting, nothing more or less.
- SamTsung

- Or maybe that's what they *want* us to believe!
- Tin Helmet

- Reagents? Hmmm ... this may be something worth looking into after all.
- Mojo Rising

- Looks like someone may either end up as a chew toy or fertilizer. Or both.
- Guy Lo

THE MERCENARY FACTOR

The biggest thing in local mercenary news is the small private war brewing between local mercenary companies **Combat, Inc.**, and the newly-formed **Fifty-Eighth Battle Brigade**. Ever since the 58th broke away from Combat, Inc., last year to form their own independent

Whisper can be useful in finding reagents—just be prepared to listen to an anti-coprorate rant during any downtime.

command, Combat, Inc., has been doing everything in its power to sabotage the new merc company's operations. And now, things are starting to get nasty.

At first Combat was more than content with using their various connections to screw with the Fifty-Eighth indirectly. The first salvo from Combat occurred when they tried to prevent the Fifty-Eighth from gaining official recognition with the Corporate Court (as a legitimate "company"), which occurred only three months ago, amidst much protest by Combat, Inc.'s legal division.

- It helped that other top-tier merc companies such as 10,000 Daggers and Tsunami lobbied the Court's licensing board members to accept the Fifty-Eighth's petition. Both would love breaking up Combat, Inc.'s near-monopoly in the area.
- Matador

- It also created a recruiting war between Combat, Inc., and the Fifty-Eighth. Both were, and still are, trying to bolster their respective ranks. Combat, Inc., offers (key word there) better pay and benefits. But their recent actions, which led to the creation of the Fifty-Eighth in the first place, have potential mercs wondering how they'll be treated. Combat, Inc., has also been giving other companies and

independent mercs the finger lately, so some are joining the Fifty-Eighth out of spite.

- Shades

- What exactly happened?
- Panzer Pete

- Combat, Inc., higher ups violated contract terms with mandatory tour extensions then waffled on or flat-out refused to pay combat bonuses.
- Shades

- LIES! It was the Fifty-Eighth who violated the terms of their contracts when they submitted fraudulent reports of combat activity in order to receive those bonuses!
- Capt. Sing

- So I guess a two-month siege of their garrison near the Canton Confederation border and the destruction of surrounding villages by Canton-backed mercenaries and guerrilla forces doesn't count, huh? And what happened to their repeated calls for reinforcements? Care to comment on that one, *Captain*?
- Shades

Combat, Inc., also tried to prevent the Fifty-Eighth from establishing their own logistical network by threatening local suppliers with certain "reprimands" should they choose to do business with the Fifty-Eighth. The tactic was partially successful, as several smaller supply providers signed "exclusive contracts" or gave Combat, Inc., "preferred customer" status. But ultimately, larger companies were more than willing to accept business from anyone with the right cred balance.

The Fifty-Eighth responded by drastically under-cutting Combat, Inc. Last month the Fifty-Eighth secured several contracts in the Canton Confederation, costing Combat, Inc., almost eight percent of its total projected revenue. And that's when the real fun started.

- Combat, Inc., may be a big regional power, but they don't have the pull they think they have. Too long at the top makes one complacent.
- Wedge

- True, but Combat, Inc., is hoping the Fifty-Eighth will go bankrupt before the neonate company gets fully established. Logistical warfare is still warfare and despite their current gains, the Fifty-Eighth's future is still in question.
- Colonel Cobra

- Hmmm, five and eight. Not so good—means "unlucky." This should never have been allowed. No wonder there is so much conflict and pain. More bad luck will come; if not now, eventually. I would not place bets on this unit's longevity or make any long-term investments.
- Qi Master

- No disrespect, but I hope you're wrong, chummer. Combat, Inc., is still trying to shut out the Fifty-Eighth with local and even regional providers. But all that means is that the "Unlucky Ones" have been more receptive to less conventional supply chains. Lots of nuyen to be made here. Just make sure that you either stay away from, or give the proper tribute, to the local pirate bands. Keeps your skin intact.
- Corsair Jane

According to secured e-documents, Combat, Inc., top commanders then authorized several reciprocity operations against Fifty-Eighth personnel. One such operation was the fire-bombing of Yellow Lantern warehouse in Kwai Tsing. That bombing cost the fledgling Fifty-Eighth millions in small arms, vehicles, and other equipment. While the Marine Authority classified it as a simple case of arson, the Fifty-Eighth quickly learned of Combat, Inc.'s involvement and retaliated in kind by attacking Combat's main airstrip in Macao. The attack was not quite as successful as the Yellow Lantern attack, but it nevertheless caused a lot of damage and disrupted Combat, Inc., operations for weeks, costing them further revenue.

Recently, a number of Fifty-Eighth mercenaries were attacked throughout the city. Several were attacked as they left the Drunken Monkey bar by a group of unknown assailants. Ten Battle Brigadiers were severely injured, and four were killed in that melee. Across the city, several more Fifty-Eighth mercs were assaulted bringing the total butcher's bill to: twenty-five injured, ten killed.

After those attacks, Major Po Xian, CO of Combat, Inc.'s air wing and Major George Grace of Matrix operations were assassinated at their respective homes. Causes of death were listed as sniper shots to the heads. Investigators estimate the shots came from at least a kilometer away.

- So that's what happened. A lot of people speculated that this was going on, but no one was able to confirm. Looks like I lost a few bets.
- Guy Lo

- Oh sure, you'd like to take this for chip-truth after your last run to Taiwan.
- HK Cavalier

- Either way, the Hong Kong government, and by extension their corporate masters, are still trying to keep a lid on this, and thus are having their spin doctors working overtime. No one wants to think about the damage two merc units having a private war in Hong Kong would cause.
- The Dragon Reborn

OPEN MERCENARY CONTRACTS: HONG KONG REGIONAL THEATER

- **Various Operations, Canton Confederation Border.** Border skirmishes continue along the Free Enterprise Zone/Canton Confederation border as the Confederation continues its attempts at territorial expansion. Standard operations include: border patrol and observation, garrison duty, intelligence gathering, and supply convoy escort. Must be able to supply own equipment and weapons, expendable supplies and medical will be provided. Chance of combat: moderate to high. Standard tour: one year. Link **<here>** for more information.
- **Maritime Escort.** Shipping companies looking to hire experienced individuals for protection of vessels traveling through Hong Kong area. Must have at least basic seamanship, swimming, and weapon skills. Bonuses for those with prior naval/escort experience. Must provide weapons and gear, all other needs provided. Chance of combat: varies. Standard Tour: varies, at least six to eight weeks. Link **<here>** for more information.
- **Supply Convoy Escort.** Corporate/humanitarian operation requesting armed escort through contested jungle areas, from Hong Kong to Huron Peak area. All skill levels available, those with marksmanship, combat driver, combat drone operation, and heavy weapon skills preferred. Chance of combat: high. Standard tour: six months to one year. Link **<here>** for more information.
- **Deep Jungle Reconnaissance.** Wanted: small group of recon specialists for operation in South Vietnam area. Employer is looking to investigate/confirm various unusual sightings in area. Further information restricted. Pay rate based on prior experience; only those with experience in jungle operations need apply. All logistical needs will be provided, personal equipment still welcome. Chance of combat: unknown. Standard Tour: varies. Link **<here>** for more information.

After the Macao and street attacks, representatives from the Hong Kong government, backed by the Corporate Court (and spearheaded by Wuxing) have since issued severe warnings to both Combat, Inc., and the Fifty-Eighth, threatening "severe sanctions" against both mercenary companies. Since then things have been quiet, but it's not over. I've also uncovered communiqués between mid-level Combat, Inc., officers or select unit commanders and fixers within Hong Kong. That's right; Combat, Inc., has resorted to shadowrunners. Wonder how long it will be before *this* starts spilling into the streets?

- And it took how many paragraphs to get to the point? This guy needs to learn how to prioritize. We don't need a history lesson—time is nuyen.
- Jin

- I was approached a few days ago about a job extracting a team. Now, I won't give details out of professional courtesy, and the fact that I like my fixer, but I was able to glean that it was going to be a hit against a freighter that just so happens is often contracted by the Fifty-Eighth. And in talking to other independent ship captains, I learned they've been offered similar deals. I can't speak for anyone else, but I don't want to get in the middle of a war—this one or the pirate war! Can't a smuggler just make her dishonest living in peace?
- Corsair Jane

- In unrelated news (heh), the freighter Wave Dancer was boarded and went missing for thirteen hours. Crew still alive, but several cargo containers were either destroyed or simply tossed overboard. Very slick, very professional by all accounts. Some aren't sure if it's related to the Combat, Inc./Fifty-Eighth or Pirate situation, but the Wave Dancer's manifest indicated that it was carrying cargo eventually bound for the Fifty-Eighth's provincial HQ.
- Findler-Man

- And that's just the first of many. From what I'm hearing, Combat, Inc., is using these runs not only to stick it to the Fifty-Eighth but as "job interviews" for runners and independent mercs alike with a contract including primo benefits being a payment option.
- The Dragon Reborn

- Then why hasn't anyone squashed them both yet?
- Wei Lo

- *sigh* Too soon, keep reading, rookie.
- Shen Lo-Fun

- Anyone want to start a pool on when the CC, Wuxing, the Hong Kong government, or all the above makes good on their threat of "sanctions"?
- Tin Helmet

- Depends on how quiet this war stays. Like any shadowrun, as long as the right sleeping giants are left undisturbed, it will be business as usual until one side is either destroyed or capitulates. But anyone here may want to hold on to their bets. I've been hearing words that some Combat, Inc., officers are less than pleased with the current leadership and the dangerous path they are taking. Keep an eye out, there may be run opportunities in the near future.
- Changdao

REGIONAL HOTSPOTS

Central and Southeast Asia has always been a hotbed of military activity going back to the 1950s, and it continues to this day. As such, mercenary work has always been plentiful. Here are the some current job listings in the Hong Kong Free Enterprise Zone area.

- What, run out of real things to talk about? I could get this from the normal places. Yeesh, nothing "tangled" about these.
- Tara Cotta

- Other than Ares has been courting the Canton Confederation for about a year now, dumping scores of surplus weapons in the area, encouraging them to *use* those weapons, while they've been pitching several of the "new" weapon systems to the Executive Council? Playing both sides is corp SOP, but the Confederation's top military brass are getting frustrated with the (lack of) leadership back in Guangzhou for not letting them "secure" a trade route to the China Sea. So instead they've let their field commanders raze villages and towns just over the Free Zone's border, which eventually they *will* have to respond to *if* they can get this maritime cluster-frag dealt with in time. And Ares, of course, is fanning the flames. That good enough for ya?
- Shades

SHADOWS AMONG THE NEON

Last but not least we have things that directly affect the runner community here in Hong Kong. There may be some overlap with other sections, but these appeal directly to us, the shadowrunners.

A PERFECT PATTERN OF DEATH

This particular bit of paydata came to me from another chummer and fellow neo-a who needed some help. His street name is Bad Karma, and he has been working on this little problem for quite a while now. Normally, I like to do my own digging, but between time constraints and BK calling in a marker to get this out there ... well, it is what it is. Take this for what you will, but I know BK, he's a good sod and we Brits have to stick together. I decided to put this one in the Government section because—ah, keep reading and you'll find out.

- Bad Karma ... why does that name sound familiar?
- HK Cavalier

Before I say too much, some full disclosure. Five years ago I met another decker with neo-a leanings. His name was Shawn Cooper; went by the street name Lancaster. He was another rich-brat transplant from Jolly Old England. But unlike me, he came here when he was only three, so he pretty much knew Hong Kong inside and out. Before meeting Shawn, I spent my time fragging around trying to please my family and being someone I wasn't.

He showed me another world, a better way of doing things. He showed me the ugly sides of the world, and I found out that brutal honesty was better than fake beauty. We were together for three years, us against the world. And we were happy. Then he just up and disappeared.

Months turned into years as I followed one dead-end lead after another. Then on a chance after-run celebration with my then-chummers, I saw this girl at one of Kindly Cheng's places wearing a pendant that used to be Shawn's. Unfortunately, I ... accidentally caused a scene and almost got my face removed by some of Cheng's people. But I agreed to work for her for the next six months if the waitress would tell me where she got the pendant.

As it turned out, she had obtained it from a vendor at Yau Tsim Mong. From there I was able to bargain with the vendor who (reluctantly) got it from a fence ... long story short, it was bought from an organlegger based out of Kowloon. Using all my contacts, I was able to track down this 'legger, one Dr. Lee (not his real name). I got a couple of friends together, and we paid the good doctor a visit. After some broken legs and cracked skulls, we found out how Shawn's body came to Dr. Lee.

It seems that Shawn had been the guest of one Huang-Fu Lao—yes, the same Huang-Fu Lao who sits on the Executive Council. And Mr. Lao is a blood magician. Guess they're not just in Aztlan anymore. It seems that Mr. Lao has combined geomancy and blood magic into some sick amalgamation. According to a mage chum, the sacrifices were done on specific dragon lines to get maximum mojo benefits. Makes me sick and furious just thinking about it.

But by now some of you are crying "bulldrek" and "where's your proof?"

- *Bulldrek*! Where's your proof! Sorry, couldn't resist.
- SunnyTzu

- **USER SUNNYTZU EJECTED FROM HOST by SYSOP>**

- Sorry, couldn't resist. Idiot. Come back *if* you have something worth contributing.
- Fastjack

After six months of investigation I thought I found my smoking gun. With the help of my chums, we were able to find all of Mr. Lao's little magical lodges, or whatever they're called. By our estimates, there were at least eight victims, at least so far.

We collected enough forensic and physical evidence that would make the most seasoned CSI proud. I even tracked down Matrix records tying Lao to these buildings and found discrepancies in his travel plans indicating he could have been at those locations at the estimated time of deaths. Hell, I was even able to bribe a lab tech down at Tseng Medical to do DNA testing for me.

<**Note:** And as always, if anyone wants to review BK's evidence, <here> is the link. -Bloodhound>

- Any traps on this one?
- Colton Croft

- Nope. Just a bunch of files, very graphic and disturbing files. Ugh. I think I'm gonna be sick.
- Findler-Man

And after we got all that evidence, I did the right thing. Or what a still-naïve kid would think is the right thing: I turned it in to HKPF. And yes, I KNOW, I should have known better. Damn mistake. But the story doesn't end here. After the failure of HKPF to do anything, except to presumably sweep it under the rug, I took all the money I had at the time, called my chummers and paid for a few more 'runners to find Mr. Lao and make him pay.

But we failed, and everyone except me and a rigger chum of mine were geeked. We tried an ambush, but it seems that HKPF decided to put a protective detail on Mr. Lao, citing "credible terrorist threats." We managed to get past the detail and into one of Lao's lodges just before he was about to carve up victim number nine. But he was simply too powerful. Everyone died, fueling the ritual even more.

So what's the point of all this? Well, right now I can't do anything else. I don't have the funds, the contacts, or even the rep to be able to pull together a team anymore. I burned it all on that one shot to get Lao, and we failed. Now my rep is in the drekker, all of my contacts have dried up, no one will hire me, and I'm almost out of cred. I don't know if people think I led my team to the slaughter, or that Lao and his connections have decided to blacklist me. Either way, I'm dead. I need to use what nuyen I have left and get out of Hong Kong. But before I go, I wanted everyone out there who will listen to know what monster is still lurking and no doubt still killing, and that just because he's a member of the *government*, and therefore protected, he's getting a free pass to keep killing.

I may not be able to stop him, but maybe someone out there can.

- Now I remember this slag. Yeah, he's not kidding. After the Lao job, no one in the Hong Kong shadows wanted to hire him. Some said he purposely led his team into a trap, others say that he ran like a coward. That it was too convenient that he was one of the two to escape. And those were just the tamer rumors. But it seemed a bit too neat and tidy, like people were going out of their way to burn this guy. I would have worked with him, but my fixer told me that if I tried, he'd conveniently lose my commcode. Whoever wanted Bad Karma out of the way could have at least have been merciful and put a bullet in his brain rather than this slow death.
- HK Cavalier

- Well, he lived up to his name. According to a HKPF file I just happened to find lying around, Daniel Felt, a.k.a. Bad Karma, was found dead in an Eastern Hong Kong flat. Cause of death: suicide by hanging. Anyone care to lay bets on this being legit?
- Digital Daemon

- I don't know, but this has gotten my attention.
- The Dragon Reborn

BUYER BEWARE

Consider this one more of a public service than anything else.

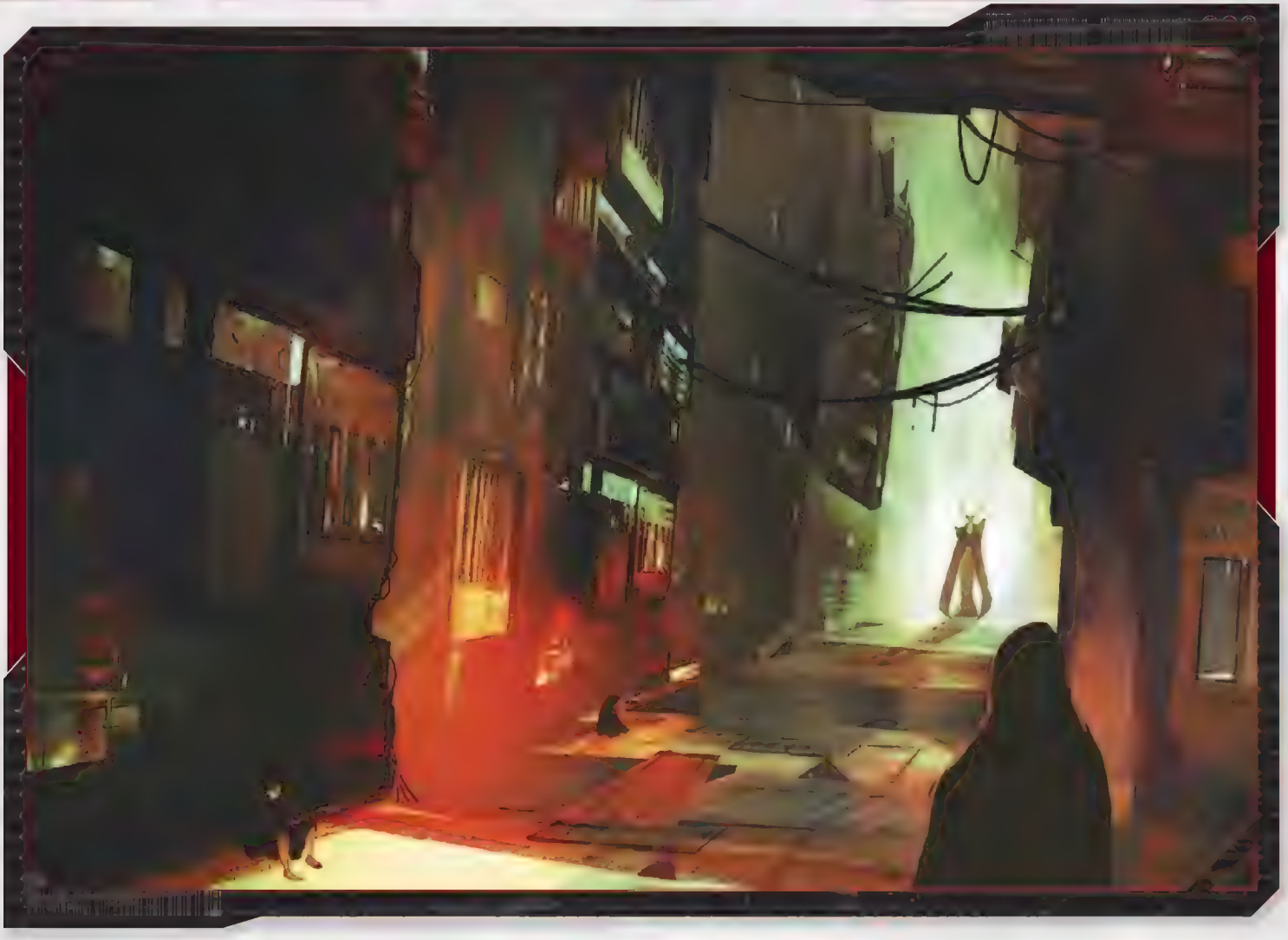
A lot of us here in the Hong Kong shadows know of Chin Le-Sang, the premier fence and black marketer in the Free Enterprise Zone. Uncle Chin, as he's known, is the go-to when you need something that causes pain and/or death to our fellow metahumans, and he only gouges you a little bit.

Sadly, Uncle Chin passed away two days ago from natural causes. And by natural causes I mean being eaten by a kraken while he fished in his boat. Go figure. He had no heirs, no partners to continue his business ventures. No one really knows how extensive his network of contacts were or where he got all of his merchandise from.

- *Noooo*! I still needed to pick up a Panther Cannon from him! FRAG ME!!!
- Changdao

But all that paydata has to be *somewhere*. His death has kicked off one of the most messed-up scavenger hunts of all time. It seems that Uncle Chin's network was so vast, and his memory so deteriorated, that he would constantly leave himself little clues and reminders throughout his office and home.

These various clues supposedly lead to various caches located throughout the Free Enterprise Zone. That's right, scattered throughout the Zone are caches containing rich scores of weapons, ammo, body armor, gear



of all kinds, electronic devices, drugs, and just about every bit of contraband known to metahumanity.

And it's all there for whoever can be the first to not only find the clues, but also decipher them. Part of Uncle Chin's system did involve a rudimentary Matrix site, which he used to conduct international business. He may have been ancient, but Uncle Chin still knew his way around a 'deck. According to some files I was able to glean from that site, there is a physical ledger that **<<<13.5 mp of file corrupted, unable to retrieve>>>**

°°°° WARNING!!! SECURITY BREACH, Emergency Protocols engaged...ineffective. IndruDEr Alert, InTRUsion Ta83a!26#ast WARNING!!! °°°°

- Sorry for the interruption, this won't take long. Consider this a friendly warning to everyone reading this file. Mr. Smyth-Harrison has indeed raised the ire of many people with his inaugural venture. So I will be blunt. I represent interested parties who are interested in making sure future releases of "Tangled Webs" never see the light of day. Compensation for such will be considerable. To those interested, please send me a private message, it will go through. And don't attempt a back-trace, you won't like the results. This is legitimate offer; I expect professionalism to be maintained.
- Unknown User

- *Mother fragger*! No one and I mean NO ONE messes with MY system. Whoever you are, you better run and hide in the darkest corners of the Matrix, because *when* I find you, your deck and every synapse in your brain are MINE!
- Captain Chaos

- And now the gauntlet has been thrown down because some will undoubtedly want Tangled Webs to continue. Well then, tally ho!
- J. Murdock

GAME INFORMATION

For the most part, the rules of *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition* are usable as is in the setting of *Hong Kong: Neon Contrails*. Magic and guns work about the same in 2055 as 2075, so there is no pressing need to change them. Purists may want to give their weapons more era-appropriate names (for example, going into the fight with an Ares Predator II instead of an Ares Predator V), but the stats from the Fifth Edition core rulebooks can be used.

One exception to this is wireless bonuses. The 2055 era of *Shadowrun* does not include wireless technology, so the wireless bonuses are not available. It is recommended that players and gamemasters treat the wireless bonuses as not being available, as the extra benefit they provide was meant to be accompanied by the risk of being hacked, which is no longer as looming in a world without wireless. However, if a gamemaster and players all agree, wireless bonuses can be treated as if they are always on.

This brings us to the most critical difference between the 2055 and 2075 settings—the Matrix. The lack of wireless functionality (and everything that comes with it, such as augmented reality) and the different structure of the Matrix in 2055 requires an adaptation of Fifth Edition rules. We'll cover how to do that here.

WHAT THE MATRIX IS AND HOW IT APPEARS

The first thing to understand is how the Matrix of 2055 is structured. Matrix topology is both complex and simple. Each major area of the Matrix is set up in a Regional Telecommunications Grid (RTG), which is depicted by a continent code (two or three letters), a slash, a country code (usually the shorthand for the country in question), a dash, and a smaller regional code (also two or three letters). Hong Kong is listed as AS/HK. Each regional grid is then separated into Local Telecommunications Grids (LTG), which is a number that also doubles as a commcode for the person or company in question. The style of how it's laid out is based on the region and its Matrix population. It can be as short as four numbers or as long as twenty.

If you are jacked into the Matrix and take a look at an RTG map, your avatar will hover over a giant globe, with a different neon-colored area designating each RTG. When you fly down into the RTG, you enter the LTG of the area, which appears like a featureless plane with (typically) green gridlines crisscrossing the "floor," "walls," and "sky," and a massive number of systems floating in apparently random placement. While there is security placed on every RTG and LTG system to ensure that it's used properly, if for nothing else than to make sure people pay for the services they use, any decker worth their stripped deck is able to easily outfox this basic security, to the point where most just have a macro set up on their deck to do so (which is updated whenever the telecom companies upgrade their security). This also allows deckers to make free long-distance phone calls, while legitimate users need to call up directory assistance, pay 1¥ to get the information they'll need, and then pay for their long distance usage

WHAT THE MATRIX LOOKS LIKE

The Matrix is what the world would be if human designers were not restrained by things such as gravity, physics, reality, historical accuracy, and good taste. The virtual reality can look however you want it to be, or at least however you can convince someone to make it for a price you can afford.

Every sort of design can be found in Matrix systems. Some are non-flashy and functional, preferring to simply mimic their real-life counterparts. An office's virtual reality system, for example, might feature desks and file cabinets and the like; a police station may feature programs that appear as officers walking around a virtual building identical to the one that exists in reality. Other systems, however, take more advantage of the possibilities to reshape reality. Sculpting a system based on an historical theme is popular, as is picking a setting from favorite books or movies. Some sculpting also likes to forsake metahumans' tendencies to move along the ground and instead has them hurtling through space or flying through the clouds. Some systems are completely abstract, perhaps using the basic Matrix constructs

(see p. XX) as a theme or devising an original pattern of shapes, textures, and patterns that make sense to whoever designed it.

In some sculpting concepts, there is an obvious relationship between form and function. Places where files are stored resemble file cabinets, bookcases, briefcases, or possibly treasure chests, while IC is made to look like guard dogs, threatening warriors, or even a dragon. Other sculpting concepts are subtler, in part to disorient the unsuspecting decker who has broken in. That bunny hopping across a sunny meadow could be a ferocious piece of Black IC, or it could be the paydata the runners are looking for. The golden statue sitting in a lit cavern at the end of a labyrinthine series of caves might be the file the runners seek, or it could just be an empty piece of data, while the real paydata is hidden in a carving on the wall far away, or even in a nondescript rock. Gamemasters are free to use the sculpting to present an entertaining and challenging environment to their players.

Users in the Matrix are defined by a *persona,* a digital avatar used to allow users to orient themselves in the Matrix, while also allowing other users to interact with them. The default avatars come in two varieties: Corporate-sold cyberdecks and cyberterminals use an obsidian man in a chrome suit wearing the corporation's logo on the breast over their heart, while commercially available items use an androgynous human made completely out of chrome with no facial features. These default avatars are typically modified by their users according to their tastes (within boundaries that their provider and/or corporate master may set). No matter what modifications are made, avatars almost always come out looking high tech and are always human-sized, even if the avatar is that of a mouse or a dragon.

The point is to be imaginative. Corporations use their virtual reality sculpting to impress or awe their clients and visitors; deckers use it to show off their skills. The environments, personas, and icons a gamemaster puts into the Matrix should show just how far the gamemaster is willing to push her imagination.

NETWORKS OF NODES

The first trick in navigating the Matrix is understanding its structure. The basic building blocks of the Matrix are nodes. A node can be something as simple as a cyberdeck or pocket secretary, or it can be a number of devices linked together, like a group of security cameras. Usually a number of nodes are linked together to form a system, and generally a system is controlled by a mainframe. Each system is laid out in a specific pattern based on the use and design of the network in question and the components it uses. The different nodes can be assigned various security codes, resources, and permissions based on the needs of the designers. In the virtual realm, each node is made up of a three-dimensional geometric shape called a construct that denotes its purpose. Constructs are then color coded to show how much security is set up on its hardware. In a system, nodes are connected by datalines, which are visually represented by white lines that pulse with information. Your avatar can travel between the nodes along these lines. To perform any action, you need the proper number of marks on the node or device—for system operations, that means at least three. If you don't have it, the system is going to use whatever means it has at its disposal to stop you. Normally, getting marks means hacking, which means doing illegal actions, which brings about the possibility of GOD causing havoc.

The basic characteristics of nodes are the appearance of its construct, its connectivity (the types of nodes it can connect to), and system operations that can be performed within it. Note that system operations can be performed by anyone that has managed to gain control of the system. The following are the types of nodes that make up all networks:

CENTRAL PROCESSING UNIT (CPU)

Every system has one and only one Central Processing Unit or CPU. It is the heart and brain of the system. Most systems have powerful IC guarding the CPU.

Construct: A huge octagonal room built of massive circuit boards pulsing with dazzling energy. Screens display the data flowing through the computer and the status of the other nodes in the system.

Connectivity: The CPU can connect to any other type of node in the system. Because of the node's extreme importance, however, it is usually protected from

the other nodes by a layer of sub-processing units so that no access port can get directly to the CPU.

SYSTEM OPERATIONS

Display Map: If you succeed in this operation, the gamemaster must show you a map of the system controlled by the CPU. The map displays its nodes along with their security codes (see p. XX), but it does not reveal the location of any files, including IC.

Shutdown: This crashes the system and dumps the decker (see the **Reboot Device** action, p. 242, *SR5*).

Cancel Alert: Cancels an Internal Alert. If there is an External Alert in progress, that is beyond your control. If you trigger one, it won't prevent any further alerts you may trigger.

Change Node: This action sends you directly to any node in the system. Once you have arrived at that node, you cannot use this action to return to the CPU.

DATASTORE (DS)

Datastores hold information or files. From the decker's point of view, this is where the loot is. Datastores also tend to be heavily loaded with IC.

Construct: A maze of rectangular blocks of energy files filled with swirling letters and numbers in different colors. Each file is 2D6 x 10 Mp in size.

Connectivity: Datastores can connect to other Datastores, SPUs, or the CPU.

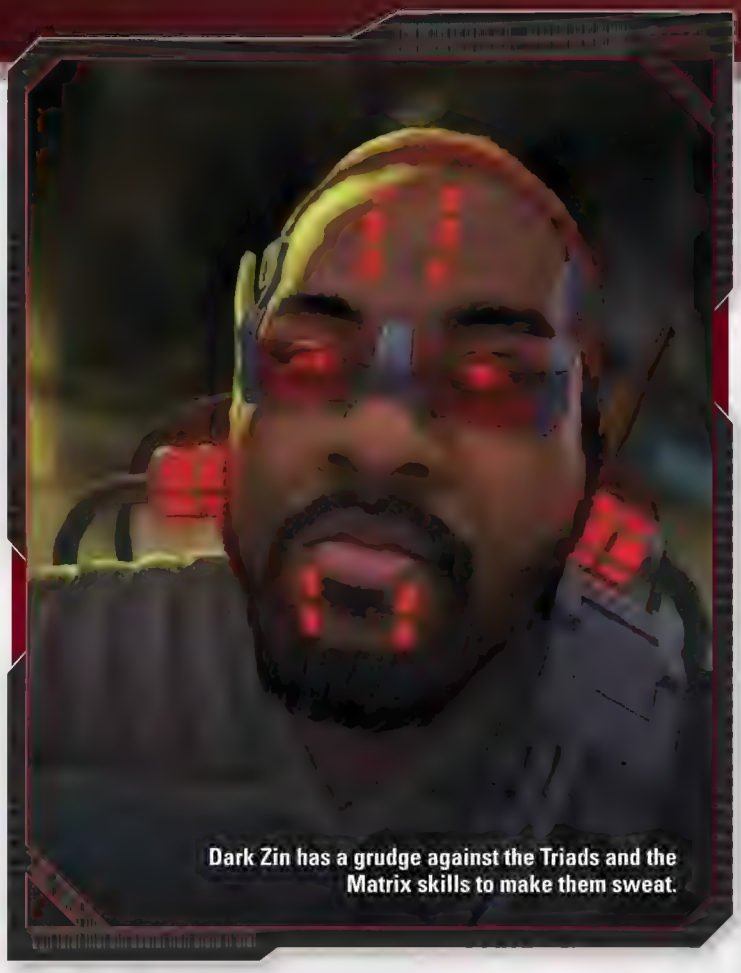
SYSTEM OPERATIONS

Transfer: Copy data to a cyberdeck's storage (downloading) or from storage to the datastore (uploading). This is governed by the deck's Data Processing rating. The decker must stay in the node until the transfer is complete or else it aborts.

Erase: Wipe out one file (for example, erase a police record. Note that this deletes the entire file).

Edit: Change contents of a file (such as awarding someone straight A's on a college transcript, or altering only a portion of a police record instead of deleting the whole file).

Read: Reading a file works like downloading it. You don't actually copy it, so you don't need storage to hold it. You are reading quickly, skimming its contents. If you want to find the private commcode for a corporate officer, read the personnel files. The gamemaster is the judge of what a decker can get from a file by reading. Simple facts like names, dates, phone numbers, addresses, and so on are easy to remember. Highly technical data cannot be memorized. For example, if you want to sell a complex formula, you must download it instead of simply reading it.



Dark Zin has a grudge against the Triads and the Matrix skills to make them sweat.

I/O PORTS (I/OP)

An I/OP is a limited-access node that opens the system to various data input/output devices: terminals, cyberdecks, printers, cameras, graphics displays, data readers for optical chips, and so on. You can jack into the system through these devices using a cyberdeck or a program carrier. In big systems, a single I/OP node could be the access point for hundreds of devices.

Construct: A pyramid-shaped, white chamber. If the I/OP controls a number of terminals, you are in a cluster of pyramids connected by datalines, usually radiating out from a large, central pyramid.

Connectivity: I/OPs can connect to SPUs or the CPU (though the latter is rare).

SYSTEM OPERATIONS

Display Message: Display a message on the device's display. This may be limited to a blinking light on a camera or a hardcopy message spewed out from a printer.

Lockout: Lock the I/OP out of the system. Once this action is performed, nothing the I/OP controls can contact the computer. If the I/OP represents a cyberterminal that someone is using, the decker must crash the terminal through cybercombat first.

SUB-PROCESSING UNITS (SPU)

An SPU is a small computer slaved to a more powerful one. The CPU gives it orders, and the SPU does various jobs for the boss node. Some SPUs act as Matrix traffic cops, connecting datalines to other nodes. Others might lead to datastores or other goodies.

Construct: A large chamber filled with pulsing banks of circuits and sizzling lines of energy.

Connectivity: SPUs can connect to any other type of node in the system.

SYSTEM OPERATIONS

None

SYSTEM ACCESS NODE (SAN)

A SAN connects to other systems or to the larger Matrix. They are the doorways into systems, meaning that deckers are very familiar with them.

Construct: Complex doorways or airlocks through the walls of the system architecture.

Connectivity: SANs can connect to an SPU. They can also connect to the CPU, but this is rare in large systems.

SYSTEM OPERATION

Lockout: The decker can lock the SAN, preventing any other persona from using it.

SLAVE (SN)

A Slave Node controls some physical process or device, anything from an electric coffeemaker to an assembly line to the elevators for a corp HQ building. You can jack into the system through a Slave Node, but only by using a program carrier.

Construct: A small, cube-shaped room, its walls covered with flashing patterns of light. The more complex the slaved system, the larger the room, and the more complex the pattern of lights.

Connectivity: SNs can connect to SPUs and to the CPU.

SYSTEM OPERATIONS

Control: You can control whatever the Slave Node controls, whether that means making all the coffee boil over or shutting down the assembly line.

Sensor Readout: You can read any sensors or cameras run by the Slave Node. For example, the Slave controlling building security would let you use the security cameras.

While these are the standardized constructs and descriptions of Matrix networks, alterations can be performed by the designer of the network to give it their own personal touch. Major alterations require a lot of processing power and can slow networks down, but sometimes such actions are done as a showpiece or a demonstration of the owning company's power. Fully designed networks with individual icons are called *sculpted systems* and are exceptionally rare, typically a sign of a AAA-Corporation's major network.

A node's Security Rating is based on a color (the Hardware Security) and a number (its Software Security). These ratings represent the node's ability to passively resist any attempt at unauthorized access, acting as the Device Rating for the node. The Ratings are as follows:

SECURITY RATING

COLOR	RATING
Blue	3
Green	4
Orange	5
Red	6

The Software Security Rating is also used to determine the ratings of some forms of IC and can never be more than double the Rating of the Hardware Security (e.g., a Green Node can only have a Software Security Rating of 8 or less.) Every time a Decker attempts a System Operation, they must beat this rating on a Hacking + Logic Test.

CYBERTERMINALS AND CYBERDECKS

Intensely complex devices, cyberterminals (and cyberdecks) are state of the art for the middle of the 21st century, just like they became again in 2075. If you're serious about your Matrix interactions, this is what you use. They contain an exceptional amount of computational ability combined with a simsense interface equivalent in strength to that of illegal BTL-level simsense entertainment units. Thanks to ASIST (which stands for Artificial Sensory Induction Systems Technology), deckers in the virtual realm receive neural feedback that makes the experiences there feel real. Food has a taste. Leather furniture has a feel. And pain hurts. This is vital to simsense experiences and recordings, where you not only see what's going on around you or what was recorded for you, but you taste, smell, and experience it emotionally. Most people keep the feedback levels under control so that the pain you would feel never does serious damage, but that can also mute other experiences. To access the full range of simsense experiences and make them as good, or better, than reality, some people turn up their feedback levels into the danger

zone, meaning it is possible for the Matrix to do them serious damage, or even kill them.

CYBERDECKS

Cyberdecks are the very bleeding edge in technology used for Matrix access and interaction. Used almost exclusively with a datajack, their small size limits their input to a simple oversized keyboard with extensive macro and customizable function keys. With only a shock-resistant case as a standard accessory, these systems are packed to the breaking point with high-end, heavily miniaturized electronics and optical circuitry designed for minimal energy use and heat build-up. While obviously the choice of shadowrunning deckers, they're also used by professionals that need to move from site-to-site frequently, as well as wageslaves who wish to work from home without having to risk the hazard of a home-to-workplace Matrix connection that comes with built-in employer monitoring. Expensive items, cyberdeck ratings are unable to be upgraded beyond their current status, as they are the very pinnacle of their design. The one exception is their memory, which can be doubled from their stock amount.

Cyberdecks in this version of the Matrix contain the same basic ratings as they do in *SR5* with one addition, as follows:

CYBERDECKS IN VIRTUAL REALITY

When decking in 2050, remember that cyberdecks by necessity work with the decker through virtual reality. They also come with BTL-quality simsense, which in SR5 terms means the decker is operating in hot sim. That means that while on the Matrix, deckers using a cyberdeck have +4D6 Initiative Dice.

DEVICE RATING

A combination of a lot of small programs as well as the standardized operating system, the Device Rating is an indication of how "tough" a cyberdeck's persona is in Matrix combat, as well as how stable it is against new and unusual circumstances in the Matrix. A cyberdeck's damage track is equal to 8 + (Device Rating ÷ 2, rounding up). Your Device Rating also represents the number of programs your deck can run at one time.

ATTACK

The Attack rating represents your deck's effectiveness at injecting harmful code into whatever you're going up against, whether it's nodes, operating systems, or other deckers. Attack is fast, loud, and unsubtle; it can be effective, but it can also draw attention that leads to damage coming your way.

SLEAZE

When you have a little more time and want to leave fewer tracks, this is how you get into the parts of the Matrix where you don't belong. Sleaze may not have the raw force of of Attack, but it also does not bring with it the same possibility of blowback

DATA PROCESSING

Data Processing represents the speed with which the cyberdeck is able to upload or download programs and files from the deck to the Matrix, or vice versa. When being used to upload a program into the deck, the rating represents how many programs of which type it can transfer in a single round. Solely for the purposes of uploading, downloading, and copying, common programs are considered to have a program Rating of 1, while hacking programs have a program Rating of 3. For example, with a Data Processing Rating of 3, a deck could upload a single hacking program, or three common programs. With Data Processing 4, you could upload both a hacking program and a common program in a single round. When uploading or downloading Matrix files, the speed is five times the Data Processing rating in Megapulses (Mp)/turn.

FIREWALL

As in *SR5*, this represents your deck's ability to defend itself.

STORAGE

The amount of space on the cyberdeck to store programs and files. This can be doubled from its standard amount by buying additional storage rewriteable optical chips that are then installed in designated slots inside the cyberdeck.

CYBERDECK OPTIONS

There are a few optional features available for those deckers who enjoy aftermarket modifications to their rigs.

HITCHER JACKS

Simsense electrodes that allow another person to ride along in the Matrix, and communicate with the decker. While they're not at risk while doing so, they are also unable to control anything, and can just see what the decker is currently seeing.

Cost: 1,000¥/jack

VIDSCREEN DISPLAY

A roll-up flatscreen that displays what the decker is currently seeing in the Matrix. It can also display any

AVAILABLE CYBERDECKS

MODEL	DEVICE RATING	ATT. ARRAY	STORAGE	AVAIL	COST
Allegiance Sigma	1	4 3 2 1	5	3R	49,500¥
Microdeck Peak	1	4 3 3 1	10	3R	58,000¥
Radio Shack PCD-100	2	5 4 3 2	10	6R	110,250¥
Allegiance Alpha	2	5 4 4 2	10	6R	123,000¥
Sony CTY-360	3	6 5 4 3	20	6R	205,750¥
Fuchi Cyber-4	3	6 5 5 3	100	9R	214,125¥
Fuchi Cyber-6	4	7 6 5 4	100	12R	345,000¥
Fuchi Cyber-7	5	8 7 6 5	200	15R	549,375¥
Fairlight Excalibur	6	9 8 7 6	200	18R	823,250¥

* Note that while these cyberdecks have different names than the *SR5* cyberdecks, their stats are equivalent. If you are using a character from *SR5* in this setting, simply select the cyberdeck with the equivalent stats.

messages they want to send into the real world while they're working. Perfect for shadowrunner teams that want to lay bets on cybercombat, and more interesting than watching the decker just sit there typing while staring into nothing.

Cost: 500¥

CYBERTERMINALS

These are larger systems that are designed with an office space in mind. These systems are typically kept in one place (they do not have internal power supplies) and often can be utilized by a user without a datajack. Extensive peripherals are available, including but not limited to a keyboard, monitor, mouse, trackball, and/or joystick. The extensive and complex nature of the Matrix requires quite a bit of control, but with the standard iconography system in place, basic training in computer systems is all that is needed to perform normal tasks. Cyberterminals are oversized for their abilities, and each attribute can be upgraded by two levels, with the exception of Memory, which can be upgraded to four times its standard size.

Cyberterminals have the same statistics as commlinks and perform largely the same functions, but with higher Device Ratings and/or more Storage relative to price. If the user is not jacked into a cyberterminal, they receive only the one normal Initiative Die. Trace IC attempting to find a cyberterminal have a +2 to their Security Rating due to the fact that cyberterminals are generally fixed in their location. Moving a cyberterminal removes this penalty for two weeks, which is a measure the more paranoid corporations take.

STORAGE

In 2075 and beyond, storage is assumed to be cheap and universal, meaning players do not have to track how much memory they have on their commlinks and how much has been used. In 2055, though, storage was not quite so prevalent, especially without access to wireless, cloud-based servers. Deckers need to remember to keep track of how they are using the space in their cyberdecks, as well as which programs they have loaded at any given time.

COMMLINKS

For the most part commlinks are unchanged from *SR5*. They get new era-appropriate names and storage ratings, but their Device Ratings and prices match up with existing models for ease of conversion.

BASICS OF THE MATRIX

The basic Matrix tasks—that is, the actions and related tests involved—work the same in 2055 as they do in 2075 and beyond. Noise remains a factor, so the decker still would be best off doing their hacking out of the house. Instead of wireless static, though, it refers to signal degradation traveling through the network of the Matrix (details on noise are on p. 230, *SR5*). GOD is still

AVAILABLE CYBERTERMINALS

MODEL	DEVICE RATING	STORAGE	AVAIL	COST
Microdeck Deskmaster	3	20	6	1,000¥
Sony R4J	4	50	8	2,250¥
Fuchi Cyber-2	5	100	10	3,000¥
MCT Sarari-Man	6	150	12	5,000¥
Renraku Desukuwa-Ku	7	200	14	8,000¥
Fairlight Joyeuse	8	300	16	12,000¥

AVAILABLE COMMLINKS

MODEL	DEVICE RATING	STORAGE	AVAIL	COST
Meta Link	1	5	2	100¥
Sony Emperor	2	5	4	700¥
Renraku Sensei	3	5	6	1,000¥
Erika Elite	4	10	8	2,500¥
Hermes Ikon	5	20	10	3,000¥
Transys Avalon	6	50	12	5,000¥
Fairlight Caliban	7	100	14	8,000¥

watching, and Overwatch Scores simulate the attention they pay to you (p. 231, *SR5*). Actions are largely the same, and Device Ratings stand in for mental attributes that a device may not have (p. 237, *SR5*). When a Host rating is called for in a test, use the Node rating instead. IC does its best to jam up deckers (p. 247, *SR5*), and programs offer bonuses to help you out. (p. 243, *SR5*).

Along with these similarities, there are some differences. We'll start with new actions

MATRIX ACTIONS

The following actions work the same as other actions in *SR5*. The new actions relate to the data-measurement requirements of the 2055-era Matrix and slower transfer speeds—not all transfers happen immediately, based on the Data Processing and Storage attributes of the devices involved.

FREE ACTION

TERMINATE DATA TRANSFER

Marks required: None
Test: Computer + Logic [Data Processing] (1) Simple Test

You terminate a data transfer you initiated. You may also terminate data transfers initiated by others if you have the appropriate access and permissions on at least one of the nodes involved in the transfer (see **Transfer Data** action just below this one).

SIMPLE ACTION

TRANSFER DATA (I/O)

Marks required: One
Test: Computer + Logic [Data Processing] v. Intuition + Firewall

You transfer a file or set of files from one node or device to another. The destination must have enough available storage for the transfer. Most transfers last until the file is transferred in full, based on the cyberdeck's Data Processing speed.

DATA SIZE

The information on Data Processing (p. XX) provides the details on uploading programs, but in order to look at the full demands of storage, we need to see how much storage space they take, and also examine the

size of many common types of files runners may encounter. Common programs take up 1 Mp, while hacker programs take up 3 Mp (remember that just because you can store a hacker program on a cyberterminal or commlink doesn't mean you can use it with that device). IC file size is listed on the IC File Size table.

Simple files—a word processing file, a basic spreadsheet, a picture, that kind of thing—will generally be under 1 Mp. In fact, up to a hundred simple files (or fifty music files) could fit in a single Mp.

A trideo takes up about ten Mp; surveillance footage is one Mp for every fifteen minutes.

IC FILE SIZE

TYPE OF IC	SIZE (IN MPS)
Acid	2 x Rating
Binder	2 x Rating
Black IC	10 x Rating
Blaster	7 x Rating
Crash	5 x Rating
Jammer	2 x Rating
Killer	5 x Rating
Marker	2 x Rating
Patrol	2 x Rating
Probe	2 x Rating
Scramble	7 x Rating
Sparky	7 x Rating
Tar Baby	5 x Rating
Track	5 x Rating

IC

This is a quick one. IC functions essentially the same as it does in *SR5* (see p. 247), but instead of using the same rating as a host, it has its own rating. The limit of this rating is based on the security rating of the system containing it (p. XX).